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ABSTRACT

This book offers methods on how to cultivate and capture teacher expertise--one of the most grossly underused assets in education. These methods are simple and include goal-oriented, data-driven collaboration and ongoing assessment that can lead to an array of effective innovations and strategies to enhance school effectiveness. Five case-study school systems are described that used these methods to overcome obstacles and achieve exceptional results for all their students. Supplementing the five case studies, brief vignettes written by practitioners show how core practices--teamwork, the use of achievement data, and planning for measurable goals--made an immediate and profound difference in student learning at their respective schools. This book contains easily adapted processes and refinements that result from such teacher collaboration and that facilitate measurable improvement. Appendix A contains an annual school-improvement planning process/checklist. Appendix B is a form for planning annual improvement goals for 2001-02. Appendix C offers improvement brainstorming guidelines. Appendix D is a team-learning log for problem/opportunity identification and solution/resolution. Appendix E is a recognition nomination form. Appendix F offers models for effective, time-efficient meetings. Appendix G offers a schedule/model for continuous instructional improvement. (Contains 75 references.) (RT)

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# THE RESULTS FIELDBOOK

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## Practical Strategies from Dramatically Improved Schools

MIKE SCHMOKER

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- We believe that the culture of an organization is a major factor shaping individual attitudes and behaviors.
- We believe that shared values and common goals shape and change the culture of healthy organizations.

# THE RESULTS FIELDBOOK

Practical Strategies from Dramatically Improved Schools

MIKE SCHMOKER

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Alexandria, Virginia USA

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
1703 N. Beauregard St. • Alexandria, VA 223111714 USA
Telephone: 1-800-933-2723 or 703-578-9600 • Fax: 703-575-5400
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# THE RESULTS FIELDBOOK

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*This book is dedicated to the day when we regard TEACHERS and their organized expertise as the center of school improvement*

*and*

*to the teachers, administrators, and consultants whose obsession with student learning made this book possible.*

# Introduction: How Organized Teacher Expertise Is Redefining Reform

> How many effective schools would you have to see to be persuaded of the educability of all children?
>
> —Ron Edmonds

The simple, core practices employed by the schools and five school systems in this book virtually cannot fail. Such processes, including the many creative extensions and adaptations described here, practically guarantee substantive and measurable school improvement. Eminently replicable, eminently adaptable, they produce results in both the short and long term. Like its predecessor, *Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement* (Schmoker, 1996, 1999), *The Results Fieldbook* shows how to cultivate and capture teacher expertise—one of the most grossly underused assets in education.

In this book we get a close, detailed look at how entire systems use these simple methods to succeed and spawn myriad other great ideas. Goal-oriented, data-driven collaboration, plus ongoing assessment in these school systems, led to an array of effective innovations and strategies. We can all learn from their collective treasury of methods to increase the effectiveness of schools everywhere.

A rapidly growing number of schools have made a momentous discovery: When teachers regularly and collaboratively review assessment data for the purpose of improving practice to reach measurable achievement goals, something magical happens. As we examine the individual schools and systems, it is significant to note that the core concepts employed by the schools are diverse and yet surprisingly similar.

The essential components described in *The Results Fieldbook* are hardly original. Other researchers, such as Michael Fullan, Susan Rosenholtz, and Judith Warren Little, to mention only a few, previously established the priority of practices like collaboration and data collection. As the key to wide-scale school improvement, however, these components both constitute and perpetuate a focus on results. Although they do not fully account for every improvement described here, collaboration, data collection, and goal-setting unlock and foster the emergence of a host

of improvement ideas and the implementation of the best "proven" programs and initiatives.

No process described in this book is beyond the ken of any school district. Moreover, the five core chapters and the individual school vignettes demonstrate that even early attempts at implementing these practices have a high probability of success.

I only wish I had space for all the schools and districts that I could have included here. Consider the findings of the now-famous EdTrust study, which identified 366 high-poverty schools in 21 states. These states beat the odds and reached exceptional levels of achievement by using "monitoring systems . . . for providing ongoing analysis of student achievement data" (Barth et al., 1999, p 9). Equally important, teachers at these schools met regularly—monthly or more often—to discuss student performance against state standards in order to reach measurable achievement goals (Richardson, 1999).

Consider a recent article in *The Los Angeles Times*, which described the three most improved schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (Helfand & Sahagun, 1999). What school practices and procedures made the difference?

- First, teachers aimed their efforts explicitly at the achievement of measurable learning goals.
- Second, they worked in teams to reach their goals. Teachers talked to one another about their work, got together regularly to analyze successes and failures, shared materials, and refined their instruction.
- Third, teachers made regular use of achievement data to identify and address areas of concern. Teacher teams "routinely assess student progress to target deficiencies and buttress strengths" (Helfand & Sahagun, 1999).

None of this is beyond imitation or adaptation in almost any setting. In the main, their procedures are simple and straightforward. Each chapter contains a sampling of teacher-designed instructional strategies that made a difference in each respective district. The discoveries you will make include the following:

- How Adlai Stevenson High School District near Chicago, Illinois, evolved from "already adequate" to world-class status—through leadership practices that any school leader could immediately benefit from and by making a religion of teamwork and teacher leadership.
- How the large, urban Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Public School District made remarkably rapid strides toward its ambitious goal of becoming "the first urban school district where all students reach high standards." You will hear about one of the jewels in their crown, a fast-growing set of schools known as the "90/90/90" schools. Ninety percent or more of the kids live below the poverty line, and 90 percent or more of the students are from minority populations. But 90 percent or more of them read at or above grade level, as measured by the Wisconsin Reading Assessment.
- How largely African American Oak Park schools near Detroit, Michigan, became a Michigan success story and why Governor John Engler touts them as an example of how a low-achieving school can experience a dramatic turnaround. Still a work in progress, Oak Park has attained its most exceptional achievements at the high school level.
- At Glendale Union High School District, near Phoenix, Arizona, you will see something exceedingly rare and urgently needed. It is a stunningly simple and mature system for implementing and refining data-driven *performance assessment* in every course—from art to physics to physical education.
- Finally, the Brazosport School District, near Houston, Texas, gives us a glimpse of a possible future. They achieved what all schools have every chance of someday becoming. It is a system where demographics exert no discernible influence on student performance. Disadvantage is transcended

by the force of an organized and optimistic effort to bring every child to grade level—no matter what.

Between the chapters on these five school systems, you will find brief vignettes—first-person, practitioner accounts of successful schools and districts that I had the privilege to work with or whose success was influenced by *Results*.

These systems and schools—and many others like them—argue for a new and much simplified conception of school "reform," a somewhat unfortunate term for the sense of failure it now evokes. They urge a far simpler, more direct—and therefore hopeful—model for school improvement. This new model is described in detail in the concluding chapter and illustrated graphically in Appendix G. The model is a synthesis of the best we can learn from all the schools and systems included in this book. It relies far more on internal expertise and on the fruits of teamwork to capture and multiply the effect of teacher collaboration through topical, continuously offered teacher-taught seminars. This model shows how to better address manifestly challenging skills and content. Other important themes include the following:

- The replication or adaptation of best practice still needs to be demystified. The notion that good strategies or systems do not travel well is too often overblown (Elmore, 2000, pp. 28–29). Almost any school could imitate or adapt the best features and techniques developed by these successful systems.
- Test-driven, measurable improvement—some caveats notwithstanding—is in fact almost always substantive improvement. A strident rejection of state and standardized tests has a shaky basis. It is counterproductive and ultimately harmful to both teacher morale and student learning (Schmoker, 2000).
- Like Stigler and Hiebert's "lesson fairs" (1999, p. 116), these processes showcase teachers' collaborative efforts to create and refine lessons and units. Such work results in immediate benefits for improved teaching and should be scheduled into the summer and school year without delay. These processes would replace much of what is now known as "staff development."
- *Leadership is as leadership does.* When it comes to defining effective leadership, we still flounder (Elmore, 2000; Gewertz, 2000). We need to build leadership around certain core questions and simple procedures that any leader could use to immediately improve the performance of schools.
- We need to put feckless, anemic teacher leadership efforts behind us to get *results-oriented* teacher leadership out of the blocks. Schools, districts, and states need to create and fund more opportunities for both leadership and responsibility for results.

Much depends on our willingness to engage rather than avoid such issues and opportunities. And time does matter. Right now, the life chances of many thousands of children hang on the actions we take. Their options, their ability to participate fully in the life of their communities depend on how soon and how vigorously we implement the best methods that these schools and systems graciously share in this book.

# Vignettes 1 and 2

## Vignette 1

Cuyamaca Elementary School and Crest Elementary School are located in the Cajon Valley Union School District, near San Diego, California. I visited in 1998, to consult with them on ways to work toward school improvement. One year later, nearly all 27 of Cajon Valley's K–8 schools realized gains on the Stanford 9 assessment, with especially significant advances in the early elementary grades.

Alice Rodriguez, former principal of Cuyamaca Elementary School and now coordinator of English language programs at the El Cajon Valley Union School District, reported on the progress made at Cuyamaca Elementary School. At Cuyamaca, 75 percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch.

Between 1998 and 1999, Cuyamaca's students made gains in every area of the Stanford 9, with especially significant gains in their focus areas, reading, and writing. Their 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades averaged a 12-point national percentile gain in reading. The increase in the percentage of students scoring at or above the 50th percentile in writing between 1998 and 1999 can be seen in the following table:

| *Grade* | *1998* | *1999* | *Gain* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Grade 2 | 47% | 60% | +13 |
| Grade 3 | 33% | 50% | +17 |
| Grade 4 | 26% | 37% | +11 |

Students improved their writing at each grade level. Third-grade writing gains brought them to first place among 22 elementary schools—higher than 11 non-Title I schools!

✍ ✍ ✍

Alice Rodriguez reports:

Last year, Mike Schmoker came to Cajon Valley and discussed his book, *Results* (1999) with school teams. At Cuyamaca, we decided to follow up on his ideas. Each grade-level team chose a "rapid results" goal to improve in reading or writing. We reviewed *Results* in staff meetings and then began to use the processes we had learned to achieve rapid results.

Grade-level teams met monthly and used the 30-minute meeting agenda suggested by the book. At these sessions, teachers brainstormed for ideas to improve reading and writing for their grade level. We then chose the top three or

four strategies to implement. After one month of implementing these strategies, teachers attended grade-level meetings with their students' scored reading and writing work. The grade-level teams reviewed the work and brainstormed for the next set of strategies to implement. We shared the data on progress at each team meeting.

Grades 3–5 made gains in writing. Grades 2–4 improved in reading and language on the Stanford 9. Along with these gains, our score on the Academic Performance Index (API) increased significantly from 1998 to 1999. We made 85 points of growth. [Note: California's API reflects academic gain against socioeconomic factors. Cuyamaca's progress is a remarkable achievement.]

We celebrated our success by sharing the data from the Stanford 9 and the writing assessment with all staff and parents. We plan to continue the grade-level team process to show more growth in Spring 2000. We believe these processes made the difference. As you can see, Cuyamaca teachers were able to achieve some surprisingly rapid results!

As principal of Cuyamaca for eight years, and, now as a district office administrator, I agree with Mike Schmoker's findings in *Results*. One of our primary roles as administrators should be "the collection, dissemination, analysis, and discussion of success stories from within and outside our district."

Now that I am at the district office, I am recognizing and disseminating success stories in a number of ways. I'm sending e-mails to applaud successes and great ideas, to say "Hey, this is happening over here." I have an "Applause" column for good teaching in the bulletin that goes out to the bilingual facilitators, so that they can use these great ideas. We are discriminating in our recognition; we focus the applause on collegiality, results, and the use of best practices.

➤ *For further information, contact Alice Rodriguez, Coordinator of English Language Programs, Cajon Valley Union School District, 189 Roanoke Rd., P.O. Box 1007, El Cajon, CA 92022-1007; phone: 619-588-3278.*

# Vignette 2

Sue Geller is the principal at Crest Elementary School a middle-class school in the Cajon Valley School District in California. Second-grade teachers Becky Harless, Claudia Garber, and Connie Pappa piloted a continuous improvement effort at the school. Their success is shown by the national percentile gains in 2nd grade in the following Stanford 9 results:

| *Subject* | *1998* | *1999* | *Gain* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reading | 53% | 73% | +20 |
| Math | 73% | 87% | +14 |
| Language | 54% | 78% | +24 |

Sue Geller reports:

At the beginning of the year, the 2nd grade team reviewed 2nd grade Stanford 9 data to look for focus areas to zero in on and to improve. Since the Stanford 9 is not administered until the 2nd grade, we reviewed the data from our school's 1st grade end-of-year assessment results, which includes Cajon Valley's reading and math performance assessments.

The 2nd grade team at Crest Elementary met on a frequent basis to discuss the curriculum and instructional strategies being used in the classroom and to select appropriate tools for student assessment. During these meetings, the teachers analyzed student work samples and identified intervention strategies when needed.

These grade-level team meetings enabled the teachers to continually review their instructional pacing to make sure that students were reaching their target benchmarks for each reporting period. We conducted individualized running record and performance assessments. We gauged student progress with developmental benchmark levels set forth by our district and with levels from the Wright Group reading series.

The data also helped us to group students in the appropriate instructional reading groups and to identify students needing more teaching—a double dose of what they did not learn initially.

Data from additional classroom assessments, such as the Silver-Burdett Ginn Language Arts and Scott Foresman/Addison-Wesley Math theme/chapter tests, were also used. This gave us a basis for ongoing dialogue to help us determine areas of weakness and to inform us of areas to modify in our instructional program.

Time is always the critical challenge for most elementary teachers who have no "official" prep period. In addition, because Crest is a small school, the teachers

have many adjunct duties; there just aren't as many teachers among whom to spread the duties around. Nonetheless, the 2nd grade team scheduled meetings every other week. For the future, creating release time for grade-level planning will be a priority for Crest.

Collaboration and ongoing dialogue was and continues to be a powerful tool for the 2nd grade team at Crest. It's critical for teachers to feel supported by their administrator and each other and to have the opportunity to learn from each other as we move our students toward academic success.

➤ *For further information, contact Sue Geller, Principal, Crest Elementary School, and 2nd grade teachers, Becky Harless, Claudia Garber, and Connie Pappa, at Cajon Valley Union School District, 189 Roanoke Rd., P.O. Box 1007, El Cajon, CA 92022-1007; phone: 619-588-3128.*

# 1 Adlai Stevenson High School District: Reward and Recognition in a "Learning Community"

> The relevant question for the learning organization is not "Who is in charge?" but rather, "How can we best get results?" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 153).

Adlai Stevenson High School District is, by choice, a large (4,000 students), single-building high school district in Lincolnshire, Illinois, just north of Chicago. It is not only an exceedingly successful system; it is also a model of how alignment, efficiency, and humane leadership, combined with simple structures and practices, can produce astounding results.

Once again, as impressive as this system and its accomplishments are, its bedrock is simplicity. Adlai Stevenson's key features are disarmingly and eminently replicable, exhibiting a reverence for

- Frequent, focused, data-driven teamwork.
- High-quality, carefully-aligned lessons, instructional units, and end-of-course assessments—all the product of teamwork.
- Recognition and praise for the individuals and teams whose contributions have helped them to achieve their vision: that of an indisputably world-class school and district.

Superintendent Richard DuFour has received an exceptional number of accolades. He is the only school administrator in Illinois to have received his state's highest award as both principal and superintendent, the only high school principal in Illinois designated as an "Instructional Leader," the first high school principal in Illinois to be presented the Distinguished Educator Award; and the nation's first principal to be designated as a "Fellow" of the National Center for Effective Schools. He was named one of the "Top 100" school administrators in the nation by *Executive Educator* magazine. Adlai Stevenson High School District was named one of the top high schools in the United States by *Redbook* magazine on three occasions, by *Newsweek* in 1998, and by *U.S. News and World Report* in 1999.

And not for nothing. Stevenson's results are a tribute to the power of vision, focus, organized intelligence, persistence—and courage. There is much to learn here.

## "But We're *Already Good*": Creative Comparison as a Lever

The first of Stevenson's simple, but profound achievements has been its ability to effectively address a problem that regularly besets affluent, high-achieving schools and districts—complacency.

How do you create that essential sense of urgency and purpose when a school already enjoys scores that are well above state or national averages? This is not only a problem for high-achieving schools. It is a problem we encounter wherever schools compare their performance only to their inferior counterparts: "We're already good, just look at our neighbors [or the state and county averages, and so forth]." Respectable scores can easily mask certain realities, such as the following:

- Many students, often disadvantaged or minority, are still well below proficiency levels.
- Teaching is, in fact, mediocre or could be much better.
- Smart, adequately achieving kids are never given the additional challenges they need to reach higher.

As they say in baseball, being born on third base doesn't mean you've hit a triple.

Such districts—they are legion—are usually not data driven or goal oriented or self-improving; they can be as insular and provincial and as apt to engage in ineffective teaching practices as their lower-achieving peers.

Data can shake up such a system. Already high-performing Stevenson found the purpose and urgency it needed through data to profoundly raise achievement. How profoundly?

## Results

When DuFour began as principal in 1983, Stevenson didn't even rank in the top 50 schools in the Midwest. By 1995, they were ranked by the College Board as the top high school in the Midwest and the sixth in the world, based on student success on Advance Placement (AP) exams. They raised achievement in every measurable category, as can be seen in the following tables:

**Results**

| *Year* | *% Receiving A and B* |
|---|---|
| 1985 | 48% |
| 1990 | 63% |
| 1996 | 74% |

Grade inflation? No, as a review of the following data reveals:

**ACT Composite Scores**

| *Year* | *Scores* |
|---|---|
| 1985 | 21.9 |
| 1990 | 23.3 |
| 1996 | 24.2 |

**Advanced Placement Participation/Achievement**

| *Year* | *Students* | *% Passing* |
|---|---|---|
| 1985 | 162 | 83% |
| 1990 | 495 | 84% |
| 1996 | 1,375 | 88% |

In a 10-year period, Stevenson increased the number of students taking highly challenging AP exams more than eightfold while *increasing the percentage of students passing.*

They also increased the number of merit scholars from 4 to 27. Additionally, Stevenson did it on 30 percent less funding per student than three surrounding districts.

## Translating Data: Lessons from the Business World

DuFour likes to point out that all schools have mission statements—the usual boilerplate that no decent person could argue with, but which has nothing to do with improvement. He emphasizes, instead, the importance of a clear, concrete academic vision—one that exacts a challenging requirement from the organization. For Stevenson, that simple vision is an unambiguous commitment to *getting every kid over that bar*. Moreover, the bar, in this case, is emphatically measurable.

Earlier than most, DuFour had the prescience to embrace rather than to eschew the lessons of leadership research from the business world. He saw that the use of data is indispensable to improvement. As one of DuFour's teachers told me, "Rick was very influenced by books like *In Search of Excellence* by Peters and Waterman (1982). He saw the applications of that kind of work for school improvement." I also strongly recommend Peters's (1987) *Thriving on Chaos* to anyone interested in school improvement, although schools are never mentioned in the book.

A set of data, by itself, is neutral. DuFour's creative, comparative use of data—benchmarking, as it is called in industry—was a brilliant stroke. Like nothing else could, it made both the need and the opportunity for improvement urgent and compelling to his staff. Citing Peters and Waterman, DuFour points out:

> There is a difference between data and information—there's a need to translate. "The school scored 305" means nothing without comparing it to something. We have to come around to comparing a score to other schools in the [same] area. . . . School administrators have an obligation to translate. We might be the best in the state, or above the national average, and so we're patting each other on the back. But at one point we decided to pick benchmarks for the highest scoring schools in the state. The one area that kept us out of the top schools in the state was reading. Even though we were doing very well in science and social studies, but we were taking a beating in reading. We couldn't have known and acted on this without a basis of comparison—in our case, a comparison with the highest achieving schools in the state. Providing this basis of comparison is the administrator's responsibility.

*"The administrator's responsibility."* We will later examine how Stevenson exemplifies shared, collaborative leadership. But it is significant to state at the start that what leaders do has a pronounced effect on how an organization fares—on its focus, its aspirations. The administrator—the leader—has to *concretely orchestrate* urgency, direction, and vision. The leader has to demonstrate the need and the opportunity for improvement. It rarely emerges spontaneously. Creating such a sense of direction and impetus is the leader's job. DuFour's use of benchmarking proved to be a vital strategy for promoting urgency and focus.

For all our required leadership and statistics courses, strategies like benchmarking have yet to earn a place in administrative preparation courses and academies. Such comparative uses of data put achievement into perspective—and augur for action. Because DuFour bothered to compare his district's achievement with that of similar districts, he and his staff no longer were innocent. They learned there were schools with the same advantages manifestly outperforming them.

Stevenson now uses this same process to examine other crucial areas. The practical strategies that are generated reveal Stevenson's refusal to leave improvement and instructional focus to chance. At the core of this process is focused, professional collaboration. DuFour's ability to translate data and to provide stewardship to his staff is practical, common sense leadership.

## The True Learning Community: Teamwork in a High-Maintenance Culture

> We're pretty happy campers here. We're heavily into the team thing.
> —STEVE ARMSTRONG, SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER, ADLAI STEVENSON HIGH SCHOOL

If leadership is as leadership does, then another prominent aspect of Stevenson's success is how it has established practices and routines that make it a true learning community. Terms like *learning community* and *collaborative culture* get thrown around somewhat loosely in our world. Yet as Little (1987) has pointed out, so-called collaboration only rarely affects achievement. In Stevenson's case, "learning community" is the real thing. The district takes deliberate steps to ensure that standards-based, results-oriented collaboration occurs on a strict schedule throughout the school, for every course, in every department.

True collaboration is a discipline—a fragile, high-maintenance set of practices and attitudes that need constant care and attention. We can never presume that productive collaboration is a foregone conclusion. We can assume that it will never be a natural, easy process for teachers to engage in automatically. This recalls DuFour's remark that a results-oriented culture is high maintenance; the same holds true for effective teamwork. The schedule, frequency, and quality of good team meetings need continuous care and attention—especially in high schools, where variable schedules and extracurricular duties present a daunting challenge.

## Teamwork: If You Require It, They Will Come

Implicit in true teamwork is an emphasis on results. When schools formalize collaboration and align it with their needs, it then receives the priority that it deserves. The antithesis to this can be seen in a story DuFour tells of a principal who invites the faculty to take advantage of an offer of substitute teachers for anyone participating in groups formed to discuss teaching and learning. The faculty loved the idea. But by year's end, not a single teacher had taken up the principal's offer.

Without a formal schedule or an explicit commitment to a result, collaboration devolves into just another option or mere talk. Focused, professional interaction, as someone once told me, is an unnatural activity. The potential for drift and delay is everywhere. To compel energy and attendance, leaders must schedule, monitor, and focus teamwork on an explicit, measurable result.

Stevenson does not invite casual collaboration on an ad hoc, if-you-have-time basis. They organize collaboration around clear routines and requirements. Consider the practical implications in the following:

**1. Teamwork is scheduled and structured.** Monday mornings are reserved for team meetings. Three of the meetings are 45 minutes long. The fourth meeting is two and one-half hours long, with students arriving late that day. Both department and common-course teams, such as all teachers of Algebra I or of U.S. History, meet on a regular basis. It is not a free for all. As one of DuFour's presentation handouts indicates, "Team norms are established to guide the collaboration."

Cherie Kolder, a science teacher at Stevenson, noted that she has a regularly scheduled meeting with the other physics teachers on Monday morning of the first week of the month. During the second week, she meets with the other teachers who teach Accelerated Physics. Her next meeting is what she calls "teacher's choice" when she can meet with others ad hoc.

**2. Teamwork is focused on improving teaching strategies that promote better**

**results on the common end-of-course assessments.** Kolder describes how her physics team met to improve teaching strategies with regard to a particularly difficult physics concept on the common physics assessment:

> Monday morning meetings are spent tinkering around with teaching demos to get concepts across. . . . In physics we were trying to come up with a concrete demo of how a rainbow works and about the total internal reflection in a raindrop. We put water in a beaker and tried to put a laser through it. Next, we projected it on an overhead projector. The demonstration wasn't working for the majority of the kids. . . .So we found a camera that allows us to project on a movie screen.

**3. Teamwork is focused on the development and refinement of the end-of-course assessments.** Teachers review standards, identify a *manageable* number of outcomes, and then develop common assessments as part of what they call the curriculum development process, which we will examine in more detail. This process gives them the alignment and common instructional focus that has accounted for their immense success.

## Learning "A Ton of Things" from Colleagues

The predictable result of these procedures is a system that is always inventing new and better ways to teach difficult skills and concepts. Here's another of Kolder's examples:

> We used Christmas lights to teach about parallel circuits and series circuits. Someone saw it at a conference. . . . Just recently we were trying to teach why the sky is blue. We needed an analogy. Things weren't working. Our challenge was to teach why the blue light scattered. . . . We found a way to show them that the blue wavelengths were similar to the wavelengths of nitrogen and oxygen, hence they resonate. *A good 75 percent more kids got it using this example* (emphasis added).

Linda Byrom teaches Algebra and Accelerated Geometry at Stevenson. She states, "There are a ton of things I've learned through collaboration." The following are some specific accomplishments of the Accelerated Geometry team:

- Learning how to design problems with more than one objective and with previously learned material.
- Designing review sheets for every chapter, which included 10 problems of this type. This really helped our students to become better problem solvers.
- Examining test and quiz design strategies to discover that not every objective needs to be covered on a test if it was covered on quizzes during the chapter.

The algebra team Byrom is on accomplished the following:

- Generated two new units this year.
- Designed a student-taught chapter that met with much success.
- Developed a unit that expanded on material found in the book using technology and more in-depth concepts.

Mark Biesiada is the team leader for World History. I envy his kids. Listen to his description of this engaging unit that he and his colleagues came up with for teaching comparative economic and political systems. Fifteen teachers (it is a *large* school/district) benefited from the collective effort to create and refine this unit:

> A few years ago, our team came up with a unit to teach the industrial revolution. . . . We wanted to find a way to help kids understand sophisticated material that would hit home with them. Teachers collected some primary sources, including documents by Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Malthus, and others. The kids divided into different camps. Adam Smith's followers would advocate leaving the

> system alone. Then there was the reform camp, the followers of John Stuart Mill. They wanted to put a human face on capitalism. A third camp wanted to abandon capitalism through gradualism. The fourth camp were communists who wanted change through violent revolution, not gradualism. A fifth camp consisted of town leaders who had to make decisions. Everyone had the same materials, done on a trial model. We developed a common semester criterion-referenced test (CRT) with multiple-choice items and an alternative assessment, such as an essay or project. The alternative assessment varied from teacher to teacher.

This is an engaging unit. But results, not just engagement, are the real goal:

> At collaborative meetings, we shared particular lessons and strategies. This way, we improved geography scores. Scores on political ideas are also very high now. One teacher introduced a way to outline Roman Geography using a computer program, which kids would fill in. Geography scores on this unit immediately went up.

History teacher Steve Armstrong describes how AP success is fostered through sharing:

> One teacher has become a master at biography. At a team meeting, he shared a captivating, eight-minute biography of someone who died at the 1886 Haymarket Riot. He helped all of us tell stories. We were doing a lesson about the Gilded Age presidents. Someone shared a great book that rated the presidents. I took his ideas, tweaked them, and did an outline for the kids to help them learn. I added more sources and pictures. I then gave it to all the members of the AP team. A third person said: "I'll add a debate component to it."

We must hasten the day when such focused collaboration is the norm, not the exception. A friend of mine gets exceptional numbers of kids to succeed on the AP U.S. History exam. It is ironic to me that he rarely has a chance to share or refine his ideas with his own district colleagues, but plenty of opportunities when he is out of town at AP conferences.

Interestingly, some of what accounts for Stevenson's success is the upside of something most of us abhor—large schools. Most of us would prefer our kids to attend smaller schools, the case for which has been documented (Darling-Hammond, 1997a, b). DuFour points out that because Stevenson's enrollment is 4,000, they have as many as eight or more teachers teaching the same course. That is an enormous well of expertise—*if people take steps to capture it.*

## Teamwork or Wasted Time?

In *The Teaching Gap*, Stigler and Hiebert (1999) remark on how so much team time is squandered. When teamwork doesn't quickly and obviously pay off, teachers begin to think, "Let's just go home early and use the time at home to prepare for tomorrow's lessons" (p. 149).

If teachers are to value collaborative time, it has to be productive. When I asked Cherie Kolder about any potential resistance to the time spent at these regular, early-morning meetings, she said:

> That's a no-brainer. It's so beneficial. If you're looking at the big picture and not just at the time spent that day, then we can see that the time spent is *saving* us lots of time. Because our after-school schedules are so different, we have to meet in the morning.

We are wise to harness such anecdotal evidence, along with the results, to make the case for scheduled teamwork. Because it has such enormous potential for improved results, I have to agree with DuFour that *there is simply no excuse for not finding this time.*

## The Results of Collaboration

The upshot of such focused interaction is *better results*. We saw how Mark Biesiada's team benefited from a computer program that measurably improved performance in Roman Geography, an identified

area of weakness on student assessments. We saw how Cherie Kolder and her colleagues refined demonstrations to teach scientific concepts both faster and more effectively. As a result, "75 percent more kids got it by using this example." Consider Linda Byrom's results in algebra:

> I'm very happy with the results of our collaboration. We just finished final exams, and our students in both Algebra courses have done *awesome* this year! With essentially the same final and a more rigorous cut-off for *C* and *D*, we had more students attaining *A* and B, and fewer students scoring *C*, *D*, and *F*, in both classes. In Algebra, we went from 5 percent of the students getting *A*s to 24.4 percent, and from 25 percent getting *B*s to 37.5 percent (C. Kolder, e-mail, February 2000).

Bet on this: Focused, ground-level collaboration will bear fruit. Establishing such focus and discipline is a goal most schools have yet to meet. It is so much easier to revise curriculum, discuss theories, commiserate, naysay, and lament parent and student shortcomings or demographic factors—over which we have little or no control. (I engaged in plenty of this, myself.) Even textbook and program implementation issues can masquerade as substantive topics without the reference point of *results*.

Productive teamwork requires a steadfast concern with measurable results. Results are possible only with common assessments. Such assessments are the glue that holds standards, curriculum, and instructional dialogue together as we strive for improvement.

## End-of-Course Assessments: The Key to Standards, Effective Teamwork, and Focus

The fastest, most efficient route to common curriculum—and to a common dialogue and focus—is common assessments. They arrest the tendency for teachers to teach wildly different skills and subject matter (Berliner, 1984, p. 53; Little, 1990, p. 527; & Rosenholtz, 1991, p. 17).

Common assessments thwart the "curricular chaos" that is unwittingly unleashed by the exhaustive and unrealistic lists of state standards that do not match the state exams (Schmoker & Marzano, 1999). Common assessments make data collection possible. Even data on letter grades take on a whole new meaning when they are anchored in common standards. Done correctly, these standards favor depth over breadth. Further, the possibility for *coherence*—collective, rational dialogue and planning—becomes essential to improvement (Schmoker, 1999, vii–viii). Coherence is a function of simple mechanisms that ensure that we review, prioritize, and then commonly assess a *manageable number* of standards on a data-driven model.

## The Curriculum Development Process

The teacher-driven mechanism by which Stevenson achieves coherence is called the "Curriculum Development Process." It includes the following activities:

- Review of standards in each curriculum area.
- Identification of student outcomes for each course.
- Development of common, comprehensive CRTs as final exams for each course taught.
- Analysis by the team of final exam results.
- Identification of problem areas.
- Development of strategies for problem areas.

Improvement does not need to be any more complicated than this. DuFour himself is a big fan of such "elegant simplicity." Part of simplicity is *economy*. In Stevenson's case, this means setting only a limited number of goals, one or two at the most per teacher, and learning more by teaching less.

## Setting Limits on Goals and Outcomes: Less Is More

Economy and discipline are essential in the areas of goal setting. They are just as essential to the second step in the curriculum development process, "identifying outcomes." As Peter Drucker writes:

> The easiest and greatest increases in productivity in knowledge work come from redefining the task and especially from *eliminating what needs not be done* (cited in DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 151) (emphasis added).

As DuFour and Eaker emphasize in their book, *Professional Learning Communities at Work* (1998), which I highly recommend:

> While there is no single way to eliminate nonessential content, it is difficult to overstate the significance of the task. The principle of addition by subtraction applies here. By subtracting content from the curriculum, schools can strengthen their ability to help students master essential knowledge and skills (p. 166).

As the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) made so clear, the countries that teach the smallest fraction of what we teach in the United States are also—amazingly—the ones getting the best results (Schmidt, McKnight, & Razien, 1996). This runs counter to the unrestrained impulses that inform most curriculum building. I knew a school that had 240 standards for 4th grade math. Four to six other grade levels also required 125 of those same standards. To get great results, we can neither teach nor assess everything generated by curriculum committees. As DuFour and Eaker write, "The results-oriented curriculum should reduce content and enable all parties to focus on essential and significant learning" (p. 162). This is not some risky or flimsy assertion. Stevenson's world-class results are the best argument for an essential—versus an exhaustive—curriculum.

## Beyond Fiction: The Value of the Curriculum Development Process

Stevenson's curriculum development process refers to curriculum in its only meaningful sense: what is taught, as opposed to what some committee writes and pours into a voluminous tome that few teachers will ever refer to or live by. As noted educational consultant Heidi Hayes Jacobs likes to say, curriculum guides are usually "well-intended fictions."

How does the curriculum development process as a whole benefit the system? For me, it clearly cultivates a respect for professional wisdom, especially collective wisdom. In an interview, DuFour listed many benefits of the curriculum development process:

- Focused instruction, which helps teachers in planning.
- Common core curriculum for students.
- Focused learning for students.
- Better tests.
- Identification of curriculum areas needing attention.
- Provision of external indicator of effectiveness for teachers.
- Most effective motivator.
- Insistence on collaboration.

Together, these form the basis of substantive improvement. It provides the common focus that is the friend of clear, productive collaboration: the clarity, economy, and priority that we are denied unless we have processes for establishing a common core of what must be taught and assessed. But there is still another advantage of a common curriculum and assessment system. Only a few districts are starting to realize its enormous potential for improvement. Stevenson is among them.

**Test and Subtest Results**

Accelerated Biology

| | | # of Items | Mean % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Science method | 24 | 76.43 |
| 2 | Cells/microscope | 24 | 81.34 |
| 3 | Evolution | 22 | 83.87 |
| 4 | DNA/RNA | 20 | 69.74 |
| 5 | Mendelian genetics | 15 | 72.87 |
| 6 | Biotechnology | 10 | 81.21 |

greatest need of the team's attention and focused dialogue include "DNA/RNA" and "Mendelian genetics." Such simple feedback promotes the targeted, energized action that is the soul of improvement.

How do teachers get such invaluable data? How much trouble does it take to assemble it? At this stage, it is not prohibitively high-tech; anyone could do it. Teachers merely pencil in designations on Scantron sheets for each of the subtests, on a master or answer key. They do this twice a year, both at semester and at the end of the school year. The tests are then run through the Scantron machine several times, once for each subtest category.

About 350 students take Accelerated Biology. If each exam gets run through the Scantron six times for each subtest, it takes a lot of hours. But it is worthwhile. Any school could pull it off, since it makes use of simple, conventional Scantron technology that has been around for years. To get this accomplished both at the semester and at the end of the year, a handful of classified employees spends a few days running these Scantron sheets through the machine for every course.

Stevenson's inventive use of old technology demonstrates the value they place on specific information about patterns of student performance. It goes a long way toward explaining why the school keeps getting better and better—and why it ranks internationally for its results.

## User-Friendly Periodic Assessment Data

The semester assessments and data reports have a powerful pre-emptive and corrective function. It tells teachers how well students are doing relative to year-end goals—while there is still time to address problems. I asked DuFour: "How else do you assess learning and progress during the year?" DuFour explained:

> We leave periodic assessment up to each team. Most of our courses are yearlong. At the minimum, teams do semester assessments and then conduct a comprehensive data analysis. But we also have a system for reporting on student progress every three weeks. Teachers do progress reports. To complete these, they stop and ask: "Are students learning what we want them to learn?"

We often overlook the usefulness of conventional sources of achievement data. Like Oak Park's use of conventional, but academically accurate report card data (see Chapter 3), Stevenson's three-week progress reports provide timely, invaluable information to students, parents, and, perhaps most important, to teachers. The progress reports prompt pride or concern. Are sufficient numbers of kids progressing? In what areas or standards are they struggling? Do I need to consult my colleagues about this area at our next team meeting?

DuFour likes the effect of these frequent reports. Completing them has to be easy and fast for busy teachers:

> Doing these reports every three weeks instead of every nine weeks has huge benefits. Parents can find out early that their child is getting a *D*. It requires teachers to ask: "How are we doing?" It enables parents to become partners. So we created a very user-friendly system for doing these progress reports every three weeks. The teacher puts only one number next to a student's name.

Let's look at a slice of one of these user-friendly progress report forms in Figure 1.1.

FIGURE 1.1 PROGRESS REPORT FORM

| *Period* | *Teacher* | *Teacher Comments* |
|---|---|---|
| 01/AP Microecon | Mr. N. Haan | IN DANGER OF FAILING<br>Needs to Complete Make-up Work |
| 02/STATISTICS | Mr. T. Sikora | Is Missing Assignments<br>CURRENT STATUS IS *D/F* |
| 03/PHYSICS | Mr. J. Horiike | CURRENT STATUS IS *B/C* |

To save time, the comments in the right column do not have to be individually written. There are 62 codes, which can appear on the progress report with the punch of a button. They can inform parents and students of everything from #3, IN DANGER OF FAILING, to #29, Demonstrates Creativity. Some other helpful comments include the following: #18, Please Contact Instructor; #20, Consistently Gives Best Effort; and #38, Needs to Be More Attentive.

Characterized by its ease and precision, this user-friendly system provides periodic assessment data. Such solid information ensures reliable and frequent feedback—for students, teachers, and parents.

## Refining the System: Better Data, Better Assessments

Although the combination of annual and semester assessment data, statistical breakdowns, and progress reports provides valuable and timely performance data, Stevenson has decided to reach for even greater precision and more frequent data. According to Sam Ritchie, director of applied arts and information services:

> With our current software, we can deliver results to teachers within hours, but it can only report, for example, that 135 of 200 students passed. It gives a raw score to help teachers do their grading. So, we follow that up with statistical breakdowns. Since we now work with data as the course is taught, we need a quicker turnaround. We're moving to formative or quarterly assessment that gives us statistical breakdowns in detail and in a timely fashion. I'm looking at a number of programs and researching a better, quicker scanning system.

They're also looking at ways that data can help them refine the assessments themselves. Cherie Kolder explained their review of annual results: "If the data indicate that a lot of smart kids get an item wrong or that lower-achieving kids are the only ones getting it right, we take a look at that item."

Similarly, Sam Ritchie discusses how teacher teams improve courses by reviewing the results of performance assessments. Ritchie adds:

> We continually look at the kinds of information teachers assess. Are the students really getting what we hope they're learning? If the data tell us a lot of kids aren't learning, we need to alter their instruction, to tweak our instruction and assessments. Did we ask questions that covered the material we actually taught? It helps to take a statistical view. It's actually an evaluation of the course.

That was one of the first things Rick emphasized when instituting this program. He needed assurance that the teachers actually taught what they were supposed to be teaching.

## Dispelling Fear in a Data-Driven Environment

The late author and researcher Susan Rosenholtz advocates for the use of data and measurable achievement goals and also warns against one of its possible side effects—the creation of an "ego-endangering environment" (Schmoker, 1999, p. 34). In Stevenson's very data-driven environment, DuFour took pains to ensure that data were regarded in a positive light. Echoing Oak Park's concern regarding this issue (see Chapter 3), Ritchie affirms: "The guarantee was that the information would never be used in an evaluation and that teachers would only see their own data in comparison to the total group, not to other individual teachers." Leadership consists of guarantees, compacts, actions, and routines. As we will see in each of the following chapters, what leaders routinely do and say accounts for an organization's success or failure.

## Leadership: A Vision for Results

> The vision should be "We're going to get every kid over that bar."
>
> —RICK DUFOUR

Behind Stevenson's success is effective leadership, including teacher leadership. Teachers exercise this leadership according to a richer, more exacting definition of vision than what commonly goes under that banner. The vision of the teachers at Stevenson is wrought not of bromides and vague aspirations, but of obligations, deadlines, and concrete accomplishments. Stevenson demonstrates thoroughly that leadership consists of method, not magic.

## Getting Empowerment Right

DuFour embraces a robust definition of empowerment. He cites management experts Peters and Waterman (1982), who recommend employees, "are given the freedom to determine their own goals and the autonomy to achieve them." Under these conditions, they believe, employees "outperform their more rigidly supervised counterparts again and again" (DuFour, presentation materials, January 1998). This should resonate with anyone in any line of knowledge work.

DuFour also likes to cite the popular business theorist, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, who writes that successful organizations must provide employees with the "freedom to act. . . . [Freedom] isn't letting employees go off and do whatever they want, but rather a clear structure which enables people to work within established boundaries in a creative and autonomous way" (DuFour, presentation materials, January 1998). This precisely echoes Peter Senge's finding that structure and clear parameters are essential to successful teamwork. The absence of clear expectations and alignment, Senge believes, only "worsens the chaos" (Senge, 1990, p. 236). Strong, results-oriented leadership establishes such boundaries. DuFour cites Keith Goldhammer, who emphasizes: "Excellent schools are inevitably led by aggressive principals determined to provide the kind of educational program they deem necessary—no matter what." DuFour also points to Ron Edmonds' findings: "An indispensable characteristic of successful schools is strong administrative leadership" (DuFour, presentation materials, January 1998).

According to DuFour, leadership combines large amounts of autonomy with clear, uncompromising direction. Stevenson's success is a *result*. As we look more closely at the school's achievement, remember Steve Armstrong's comments about teaching at Stevenson:

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According to DuFour, leadership combines large amounts of autonomy with clear, uncompromising direction. Stevenson's success is a *result*. As we look more closely at the school's achievement, remember Steve Armstrong's comments about teaching at Stevenson:

> I've never met a person who isn't satisfied here. I mean that honestly. I've never met a person who doesn't like working here at Stevenson.

Stevenson's collective vision provides this direction. But as Sam Ritchie points out, DuFour's approach in creating the vision was not autocratic: "The easiest way is for someone to come in saying 'I have all the answers and here they are.' Instead, Rick involved people in the process. He formed task forces, and listened to lots of people. He did not dictate." These are two distinct approaches.

DuFour also precisely sensed where the district needed to go—and how to get them from aspiration to hard commitment. Stevenson made a commitment to create a world-class school. "First we had the flimsy stuff and the glowing statement," Ritchie told me. "Then he led us through a process. Once we had a vision, he asked the teachers, 'What are your commitments to that vision over the course of a year?' He asked the faculty to do things that were backed up by research. He said, 'We should do this because successful organizations have these traits.' Because of the way Rick did it, the commitment by the faculty was really self-imposed."

## Persuasion Versus Coercion: A Leader's Tool Box

If commitment to a vision is to be collectively "self-imposed," then persuasion, not coercion, is key. I have seen firsthand how DuFour makes persuasive use of gently confrontational tools. DuFour provokes reflection to generate a logical vs. defensive response from faculty. His skill at employing these tools helps people to weigh the implications of their current practices or beliefs.

Most of us agree at least nominally with the notion that "all kids can learn." DuFour saw an opportunity here. His genius can be seen in the following exercise. In "Variations on a Theme" (part of his 1998 presentation materials), DuFour forces us, gently I think, to confront the implications of the statement, "All kids can learn." He provides the following options and asks us to select the one that explains our interpretation of the statement:

- Based on their ability.
- If they take advantage of the opportunity to learn.
- And we will accept responsibility for their growth.
- And we will establish high standards of learning that we expect all students to achieve.

This exercise forces us to confront the difficult implications of this radical new belief statement. The first two choices obviously fail to embrace the soul of the statement that all kids can learn. Correctly understood, the statement obligates us to find a way to ensure that they do. We can no longer indulge in the excuse, as DuFour states, that "learning is dependent on factors over which we have little control" (presentation materials, January 1998).

Many of us remember the enthusiasm with which we embraced the notion that all students could achieve at high levels. Although it quickly lost its meaning on the shoals of many an unsuccessful reform initiative, DuFour's incisive, imaginative exercise brings us back to the original premise—and promise—of the statement. DuFour's exercise opens the door for us to substantiate the vision with evidence, with real school data, and with results that demonstrate that unprecedented levels of achievement are within our reach. Orchestrating these discussions and reiterating the evidence of school success are among the leader's most important tasks. Without data, vision cannot exist.

DuFour conducts other exercises by asking teachers to privately evaluate themselves, their school, and their department. He asks them to evaluate curriculum coherence, course quality, and the amount of professional collaboration. This helps to confront major issues with objective and collective examination. It allows for revelations

about common aspirations and possibilities. In such settings, educators realize that despite our differences, the majority of teachers want better results and are willing to try new strategies and arrangements—*if there is evidence that they work*.

Leadership is defined and actualized through constant, gentle confrontation. It shows us where we are and guides us to where we want to be.

## Vision: Specific, Measurable Results

The following remarks from DuFour's excellent column in the National Staff Development Council's *Journal of Staff Development*, express his recognition of the relationship between data and a genuine vision:

> Developing a collective sense of what the school might become is an essential step on the journey to becoming a learning community, *but it is not sufficient*. Schools also must be willing to assess their current reality with total candor and honesty, and then describe the specific measurable results they expect to see as a result of achieving their vision. *Using data is the most effective strategy for translating the good intentions described in a vision statement into meaningful improvement targets* (2000, p. 71) (emphasis added).

Vision is as vision does. If we want better results, we need to start with data. The use of data enables us to set targets and assess progress toward those goals. It makes the vision real.

As new actions begin to conform to that ideal, results are inevitable. This, in turn, cultivates hope and reinforces the commitment to that ideal. But none of this is automatic. As DuFour points out, a productive culture is a high-maintenance culture. It needs constant cultivation and attention.

## Sustaining the Vision with "Boorish Redundancy"

One of the most powerful lessons to be learned from Stevenson is that good things happen when we dog, obsess, and communicate constantly about just a few essential things. Anyone can do this. In their book, DuFour and Eaker (1998) stress the supreme importance of merely paying attention to the essentials, that sustaining the vision ". . . is not a product of eloquence or slick materials. Like any organization, schools communicate what is valued by what they focus on. . . . In most organizations, what gets monitored gets done" (p. 107).

How much communication, emphasis, and attention are enough? I concur heartily with DuFour that we must refer to the organization's vision and its goals—as I've heard him say—with "boorish redundancy." Stevenson communicates and monitors the vision in compelling ways. The district inculcates core values and vision through an excellent teacher induction program, which emphasizes student mastery of the school's core academic values—and even tests new teachers on their knowledge of these values. Regular visits to team meetings by the superintendent—and the best reward and recognition system that I know—reinforce their goals and vision.

Such eminently doable, replicable strategies for leadership provide a focus for what counts. They do not require exceptional charisma, rare gifts, or an advanced degree. Effective leaders keep the flame lit—*by asking the right questions*.

## Leadership: Asking Questions

"All learning organizations," write DuFour and Eaker (1998), "are driven by persistent questioning of the status quo. . . . The focus of the driving questions must be enhanced student achievement." They cite research that demonstrates that successful schools "are in the habit of asking themselves tough questions that focus on the achievement of their students" (p. 109).

Stevenson's teachers benefit from asking tough questions—of themselves and others. In a fascinating passage, DuFour and Eaker describe Connie, a fictional composite of a new teacher

Connie arrives at her first evaluation expecting advice and a rating on her performance. "She was wrong," we are told, "on both counts." Instead, Connie is peppered with probing questions like the following from her principal:

- Why did you teach this content?
- How did it fit into the major outcomes of the course?
- Why did you use these instructional strategies?
- What patterns did you see in your teaching?
- What worked and what didn't work?
- How might you change or improve the lesson the next time you teach it? (p. 49).

Why is this little battery of questions so powerful? The questions get right to the heart of the matter. They are direct, yet respectful. Neither awkward nor autocratic, these questions also do not require all-knowing instructional expertise by the administrator. *Any administrator* could comfortably ask these very questions during all evaluations. Over a period of time, the educational benefits for both evaluator and teacher would be immense—especially in a standards-based system. The value of such sessions far surpasses what most of us underwent in the name of obligatory teacher evaluation.

At Stevenson, DuFour requires everyone, including administrators, to question the status quo in the service of academic improvement—with numbing regularity:

- What questions do I ask?
- Are they tough questions that focus on achievement?
- What do I monitor?
- What do I celebrate through ceremonies and rituals?
- Am I consistent and persistent in communicating my priorities?
- What am I willing to confront? (DuFour, presentation materials, January 1998).

The implications of the last bulleted question represents one of the toughest aspects of management.

## Enforcing the Vision: Courage, Confrontation, and Commitment

DuFour and Eaker cite author James McGregor Burns in pointing out that leaders "must settle for far less than universal affection. . . . They must accept conflict. They must be willing and able to be unloved" (DuFour & Eaker, p. 113).

DuFour tells the story of Henry, a high school science teacher. Henry's department developed and adopted a set of principles and commitments to ensure the success of a high proportion of students. Henry balked at this. He continued to flunk students at record rates and claimed to be the only one in the department with high standards.

The principal confronted Henry, not with personal criticism, but with facts. Henry's department had made a collective commitment to high rates of student success. The principal shared data with Henry that showed that students who transferred to his sections invariably saw their grades decline. But Henry was unrelenting in his attitude and actions.

Henry was informed that his class would be visited with greater frequency and that his lesson plans would be reviewed regularly for their consistency with course outcomes. Initially, Henry was angry and resentful. Then something interesting happened. The principal's feedback and encouragement began to pay off. Henry's students began to benefit from the greater clarity of his lessons and from their alignment with end-of-semester and end-of-course assessments. Best of all, for the first time, *Henry's students outperformed the total group*.

Such a story is inspiring on several counts. It reveals the necessary courage that effective administration requires. Also, it points out the difference that courageous administration can make for kids. Moreover, it demonstrates the power of covenants—

not bullish administrative insensitivity. It shows the importance of explicit, collective commitments to noble ends. Try to imagine this story without the existence of written and collectively established commitments. It would quickly devolve into a war of wills, personalities, and preferences.

There are alternatives to acrimony and termination. Teachers can and do improve if given the chance in a fair, constructive, standards-based environment. Such commitments and procedures would be invaluable to administrators. Unfortunately, some of the best, most unassailable methods and policies never get taught in administrative preparation training. In addition, they are never discussed in the typical monthly administrative meeting. The next section represents another grossly underused, but hugely potent force for organizational improvement: recognition and reward.

## Leadership's Best-Kept Secret: Recognition and Reward

Stevenson has one of the most exceptional and mature systems found in any school district for honoring and encouraging results and results-oriented behavior. In the last chapter of *Results*, I wrote about a personal discovery that began with Tom Peters's dramatic and inspiring accounts of organizations making immense progress through systematically recognizing and rewarding employees. (I am forever indebted to Tucson's Marybelle McCorkle for making *Thriving on Chaos* required reading.)

Peters tells stories about how publicly honoring employees and teams with simple tokens, like coffee cups or thank you notes, may be *the most powerful* way to influence organizational behavior. Similarly, Bob Nelson, in his best-selling book, *1001 Ways to Reward Employees* (1994), found that "recognition for a job well done is the top motivator of employee performance" (p. xv). Educators Blasé and Kirby (1992) found this to be just as true for schools. Finally, both Dan Lortie and Robert Evans found that although such recognition was crucial, it was virtually unheard of in schools (Schmoker, 1999, pp. 111–115).

I have had great experiences by giving a token of appreciation to teachers, such as movie passes, bookstore gift certificates, thank you notes, and lunch passes. In the wake of such gestures, I witnessed goals met, projects completed in record time, and staff participation and enthusiasm increasing exponentially.

DuFour has known—and acted on—this research longer than anyone I know. Stevenson has publicly honored staff for their accomplishments on a regular basis for more than 12 years. During this time, teachers and students have set new achievement records. At Stevenson, a portion of every faculty meeting is also devoted to sharing stories of individual and team accomplishments.

DuFour uses a variety of strategies for honoring teachers. One of them mimics radio commentator Paul Harvey's "Rest of the Story." DuFour describes the chronology of an outstanding effort or accomplishment, withholding the honoree's name until the end:

> A teacher who defied the conventional wisdom, claiming that sophomores could in fact take and pass the AP exam in European History. He created two sections for sophomores only. Then he not only challenged his students to succeed, he began to provide voluntary evening study sessions that were attended by almost every student in these new sophomore sections. As a result, 96 percent of his sophomores earned honors grades on the exam, causing other departments to look at their expectations. Please join me in expressing our appreciation to a colleague who illustrates Stevenson's commitment to searching for new ways to help students achieve at high levels. —Mr. Paul Fitzgerald.

DuFour similarly recognizes team milestones:

- A freshman English team that set up a new system for assisting struggling students. It resulted in every one of them passing with a C or better

while expressing high satisfaction with their involvement and accomplishments.

• The math department, when they decided to experiment with putting students in teams of four, so that they could help each other master difficult material. For five consecutive semesters, students set new achievement records for every academic standard monitored by the department (DuFour & Eaker, pp. 137–138).

Contrast this with the experience of a teacher I know who helped record numbers of disadvantaged students pass AP exams. When asked what recognition he received from school or district administrators, he said, "They weren't even aware of my accomplishments." This exemplifies egalitarianism gone awry. *We are what we monitor, honor, and pay attention to.*

Over the years, Stevenson has publicly recognized thousands of staff members for extraordinary accomplishments. For the most notable accomplishments, teachers receive a plaque, the "Super Pat" award, named for the school mascot, the Patriot. Hundreds of these plaques have been awarded in the past decade. There are no caps or quotas for the number of staff who receive it. Anyone can nominate fellow teachers. In addition, they have given hundreds of roses to faculties and teams, such as the algebra and science teams, for their exceptional accomplishments. Frustrated by a limited sense of the "tangibility" of their accomplishments, sociologist Dan Lortie (1975) found that teachers have a profound need for such recognition. Lamentably, the scarcity of occasions that produce prideful feelings in schools underscores the *"difficulty teachers see in attaining worthwhile results"* (p. 133) (emphasis added).

Recognition and reward are practices whose time has come. Every school needs to create such routines for honoring and nurturing results-oriented accomplishments. To help get such a program off the ground in your school, see Appendix E, "Recognition Nomination Form."

## Teacher Leadership

Opportunities for leadership experience provide another source of pride for teachers. A crying need exists for excellent, practicing teachers to advance—to lead—by taking a more formal and explicit role in the supervision and improvement of instruction. At Stevenson, a host of new, redefined positions have emerged. New positions, most with reduced teaching loads, include directors, department chairs, and team leaders. These jobs entail substantive responsibility for results. DuFour shared the following with me:

> We have been trying to disperse leadership. It is not just the concern of directors and department chairs, but also the leadership of the team for each course. So we have team leaders for each respective course. We have spent time teaching these people leadership skills and collaboration. For us, the heart of leadership is a willingness to assume responsibility. Team leaders meet with the department chair on a weekly basis and they help run the team meetings.
>
> One of the reasons this works is that we like to pick people who seem to have a desire, or interest to lead or to become a director—a director is like a department chair, but with much greater responsibilities. They almost operate as vice principals. Directors actually evaluate, confront, and fire people. They are part of the administrative team. They will make five to ten thousand dollars more per year for these responsibilities.

Need an up-to-date report on progress and problems in Algebra I or United States History? Is someone giving her singular attention to each respective course? Go to the team leader for the answer. In yet another brilliant move, Stevenson recast traditional positions and created a host of new leadership opportunities where it counts—at the instructional level.

The difference between directors and conventional department chairs can be seen in the smart, specific job descriptions written for them:

• Possess working knowledge of the research on effective, current educational theory and practice.

• Identify discrepancies between the vision and actual conditions and formulate short-term and long-term objectives to address these discrepancies.

• Continually refer staff and community to improvement goals.

Some of Stevenson's department chairs have yet to make the transition to the new role of director, but Stevenson still moves ahead sensibly and gradually. As DuFour indicates: "Incrementally, as folks retire, we redefine the position of department chair."

I would love to see research conducted on the results of this redefinition of leadership roles with highly specific, results-oriented expectations. The success of Stevenson, Oak Park, Glendale Union (see Chapter 4), and others appears to be linked to solid, goal-oriented expectations for designated personnel, whose impact takes them far beyond what the superintendent and principal could ever achieve by themselves.

Such expectations and definitions influence every corner of the organization. Leadership is influence. Even new teachers can exercise leadership when they are members of teams. When teachers share and help to refine each other's strategies, they improve instruction. In fact, such leadership is built right into the teacher's job description. The hiring process itself, as Mark Biesiada told me, makes clear that all teachers are expected to share and generate expertise and to help the team find better ways to get every kid over that bar.

## Final Thoughts

Stevenson exhibits real *alignment* between actions and intended outcomes. Much of what the teachers and administrators learned is a testament to the often-maligned business and organizational improvement literature and to DuFour's early and unabashed embrace of its value for schools. Business practices helped Stevenson establish new norms for conventional practices. Adapting these practices reinforced greater alignment between

- Professional collaboration and results.
- Leadership and results.
- Curricular processes and results.
- Teacher recognition and results.

The upshot has been unprecedented levels of learning and career options for thousands of students who had the good fortune to attend this indisputably world-class *public* school with its brilliant and energized staff.

➤ *For further information, contact Richard DuFour, Superintendent, Adlai Stevenson High School District, One Stevenson Drive, Lincolnshire, IL 60069; phone: 837-634-4000.*

# Vignettes 3 and 4

## Vignette 3

Dawn Smith is the principal of Warm Springs Elementary School, located on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in central Oregon. A K–4 school, it is part of the Jefferson County School District. Ninety-nine percent of Warm Springs' students are Native American. Eighty-six percent are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. At the elementary level, the Oregon State Assessment is administered in the 3rd grade. The percentage of students reaching the 3rd grade benchmark on Oregon State Assessment is shown in the following table:

| *Subject* | *1996* | *2000* |
|---|---|---|
| Reading | 32% | 81% |
| Math | 16% | 63% |

Jefferson County administers the Terra Nova assessment to children in Grades 1–4. Between 1996 and 1999, the four grade levels averaged a 16-point national percentile increase in reading and a 19-point increase in math.

Dawn Smith reports:

I read *Results* (Schmoker, 1996) in 1996, while researching sustainable school improvement practices. The book's emphasis on clear student outcomes, the need for extensive staff collaboration, and ongoing action research reinforced our beliefs concerning school reform.

Teachers at Warm Springs meet regularly for learning, collaboration, and planning. Since traditional staff meetings are scheduled only once a month, this leaves three weeks each month for grade-level or cross grade-level teams to meet about improvements for curriculum work, planning, and discussions.

In the past two years, we also added one hour a week for team meetings during a time when many students take advantage of the religious release time. The remaining students spend that time in sustained silent reading conducted by other school personnel. These Monday meetings focus primarily on the implementation of strategies and materials that resulted from a two-year English-as-a-second-language (ESL) course of classes offered by our educational partnership with Lewis & Clark College.

We measure student achievement in a variety of ways, looking mostly at reading and math progress. We set our annual improvement goals based on the Oregon State and Terra Nova assessments. But we also look at both individual and group assessment data regularly. Teachers formally assess reading once a week and math once a month so that we know what and where children are reading. The teachers then look for patterns of strength and weakness among their students. These become the topics for the weekly improvement meetings. At these meetings, grade-level teams share or brainstorm new or better ways to address areas of difficulty their kids are having or to share materials. This collaborative work has really been the key to our success.

In addition, I review these assessments with a team of our building's Title I teachers and the school improvement resource teacher. We look at the weekly and monthly reports to review areas of weakness and to see where extra assistance or parental contact might be needed. We also monitor attendance and behavior data that relate to our academic goals.

Our math reports are based on a series of cumulative math tests that our teachers designed four years ago. Aligned to the state and district curriculum goals, these tests are incorporated into the yearly teaching plans. The tests cover concepts and skills in various formats for each grade level. Teachers use these tests to ensure that kids learn things like calendar concepts and to detect any weaknesses in estimation, for example. The data from assessments, annual achievement tests, attendance/behavior data, and parent and staff survey data constitute the foundation for the formal goal-setting process.

It is so easy. These simple processes, done over time, have been the keys to our improvement.

➤ *For further information, contact Dawn Smith, Principal, Warm Springs Elementary School, P.O. Box 1269, Warm Springs, OR 97761; phone: 541-553-1128.*

# Vignette 4

Diane Avery is the principal at the Kempton Elementary School, located in the La Mesa/Spring Valley School District near San Diego, California. I visited the school in 1998. The following year, 16 of 18 schools in the district made gains on California's API, which reflects Stanford 9 academic gains against socioeconomic factors.

At Kempton, 80 percent of the student body ranks in the low socioeconomic status (SES) group. Seventy-seven percent are minority students with 37 percent of the students considered limited English proficient (LEP). Kempton tied one other school for the largest API gain in the district—65 points—on the strength of their Stanford 9 increases in 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades, where scores rose in every category.

| *Grade* | *Reading* | *Gain* | *Math* | *Gain* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grade 2 | 49% to 58% | +9 | 44% to 68% | +24 |
| Grade 3 | 39% to 51% | +12 | 56% to 80% | +24 |
| Grade 4 | 35% to 48% | +13 | 41% to 53% | +12 |

Diane Avery reports:

When setting our annual goals, we look at the Stanford 9 and other county and district assessments. This analysis provides us with a picture of strengths and weaknesses to help us target areas for improvement. We break the annual goals into 30-day increments.

Grade-level teams at Kempton meet weekly to learn from each other. We added a "minimum day" [see description later in this vignette] designed to help facilitate this process. Once a month, grade-level teams determine two 30-day, short-term target goals for their grade level, such as identifying the main characters in a story. At staff meetings, we revisit these goals. Grade-level teams share their results and strategies for continued improvement. One team, for example, tackled a problem and increased the number of students who could reach the standard from 55 of 80 students to *all 80* in one month (we keep records of all this). At the end of the 30-day period, teachers assess student achievement, write a summary of the results, and make a graphic representation like a chart showing dates of measurement and the number of students before and after; they share these with the rest of the staff. Teams create their own assessments to monitor progress on these monthly goals. Then they list the next most important goals based on areas of weakness. Sometimes a grade-level team will tackle the same problem two months in a row.

All grade levels agree that our focus on the 30-day goals is the one common thread that runs throughout the school. We post the goals in classrooms and even discuss them with students. In addition, teachers highlight lessons in their lesson plan books that directly support the 30-day goals. They leave their plan books open, so that I can review their lessons during my walk-through observations. Kids also know these goals. The district goals, school goals, 30-day goals, and daily lesson plans are all linked.

An initial challenge for us was helping teachers to understand the "big picture." Many had not looked at all of their planning time as pieces of the same puzzle; they needed to see that their personal, annual, and 30-day goals and planning are all linked—so that they're not overwhelmed by too many seemingly different goals.

Another challenge was time—we had to find time for monthly goal-setting and data analysis of our 30-day assessments. For us, this meant setting aside one staff meeting a month during the first year. During the second year, the school proposed a "minimum day" schedule once a week. The staff was willing to work the additional time four days a week in order to free up one afternoon each week where they could meet and discuss student achievement.

One teacher went from being very resistant to the 30-day goals to saying to me, "It was one of the most powerful things we do for children. It gave focus to my lessons." My staff now knows the road to get to their student achievement targets. When we get there, it is truly a celebration for all of us.

➤ *For more information, contact Diane Avery, Principal, Kempton Elementary School, 740 Kempton St., Spring Valley, CA 91977; phone: 619-668-5870.*

# 2 Milwaukee Public Schools: Record-Breaking Achievement in a Large, Urban School District

The Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) is the 16th largest school district in the United States. It serves more than 100,000 students in the most racially diverse and economically disadvantaged school district in Wisconsin. Nonetheless, we find the same attitude that always characterizes over-achieving schools and systems:

> Despite sometimes daunting student economic and social conditions, the educational philosophy of the district is founded on the belief that all children can learn at high levels (*MPS Accountability Report*, 1999).

Strong words. But perhaps no stronger than much of the pabulum we find in so many district documents and mission statements around the country. The fact that MPS is actually living up to their own rhetoric—and getting exceptional results—distinguishes MPS from other districts.

## K–12 Gains

The year 1999 was a banner year for MPS. Some highlights from the 1999 *Accountability Report*:

- After making progress in several crucial areas in the last few years, MPS made remarkable improvements on the Wisconsin State Assessment System (WSAS) at every level—from elementary through high school.

- At the elementary level, nearly 70 percent of MPS realized increases in reading and 35 schools met ambitious, long-term board goals for reading achievement. Those increases took place at 21 more schools than the year before.

- Districtwide, the percentage of students scoring at or above the "proficient" level in mathematics doubled from 23 percent to 46 percent. Their board goal in math was met by 64 schools, compared to just 10 schools the year before.

• More than two-thirds of the schools involved in the highly focused, standards-based Target Teach Pilot Program experienced dramatic increases on the Grade 3 Reading Test and on the reading component of the Grade 4 WSAS. The gap between the lower-achieving pilot schools and the district as a whole narrowed significantly. Given their success, MPS has increased the number of pilot schools from 25 to 34 schools.

• According to its own internal performance assessments in math and science, MPS made impressive districtwide gains. Its strongest showing—in every subject—came at the middle school level, which had historically achieved the poorest overall ranking.

• On the science performance assessment, the percentage of students in Grade 5 achieving proficiency tripled in three years, from just under 12 percent to 36 percent. Between 1997 and 1999, the number of schools with 50 percent or more students reaching the proficiency level rose from 7 percent to 45 percent.

• On the math performance assessment, arguably the most challenging test, the percentage of students in Grade 6 reaching the proficiency level rose from 8 percent to 12 percent. Students in Grade 7 realized increases from 17 percent to 26 percent during the same period.

• Middle school results on the WSAS show increases in every subject area, with the largest gains in reading and social studies. In reading, the percentage of students scoring at or above the proficiency level rose from 31 percent to 46 percent, and in social studies, from 37 percent to 58 percent. *Achievement increased in 90 percent of MPS's 34 middle schools*, where learning problems had been particularly stubborn. Eleven middle schools met board goals in 1999, up from only one school the year before.

• Middle school math increased only modestly on the WSAS, but seven schools managed to meet board goals, up from only *one* school in 1997–98.

• In middle school, the results in writing showed steady increases. The proficiency level increased by 25 percent in 1997, 35 percent in 1998, and 45 percent in 1999.

At the high school level, higher achievement was noted in every area of the WSAS except science, which remained the same as the prior year. In reading, the percentage of students reaching the proficiency level rose from 34 percent to 42 percent, and in social studies, it increased from 36 percent to 51 percent.

## Challenge and Triumph: The 90/90/90 Schools in MPS

Among MPS's most impressive accomplishments is the growing number of 90/90/90 schools—those schools where:

• More than 90 percent are on free and reduced-cost lunch.

• More than 90 percent are from ethnic minorities.

• More than 90 percent are reading at or above grade level on standardized tests.

The growing number of elementary schools in the MPS system designated as "90/90/90" is impressive. In 1997, seven schools achieved this prestigious 90/90/90 status. In 1998, there were 18. There are now a number of close runners-up. As we will see, these gains demonstrate—again—the simple power of clear standards, focused teaming, and goal-oriented, data-driven structures.

## Data-Driven Seminars

At the heart of the Milwaukee improvement effort is the Data-Driven Seminar. Doug Reeves,

author, consultant, and president of the Center for Performance Assessment, Denver, Colorado, introduced this program. Reeves began consulting for MPS in 1996. He worked with MPS staff to develop simple procedures for teaching to their standards, and for using data to guide their instructional efforts.

Rather than create an inordinate dependence on himself or his staff, Reeves provided effective consulting services that can be used as a model in other school systems. He took pains to teach MPS senior staff how to conduct these Data-Driven Seminars, as well as another program that came to be called Treasure Hunts. Because Reeves trained key people in these methods, data analysis became a part of the fabric of the district's improvement planning.

One of the people Reeves taught to conduct these seminars was Senior Evaluator Tim McElhatton. Over a period of several years, McElhatton conducted most of these seminars numerous times each year for any school that invited him. To train other staff, he guides them through a systematic analysis of achievement data. These seminars enable educators to focus and act on improvement plans. Although attendance is voluntary, these programs are enormously well attended. During the 1998–99 school year, over 90 percent of the more than 150 MPS schools in the district attended one or more of McElhatton's four-hour sessions.

McElhatton insists that key teachers from the school—its leadership—be there. Though attendance is voluntary for each school, each attending school must bring a contingent of key people. This includes the school principal. McElhatton notes that when key leaders attend the seminars, wonderful things happen. These simple, pragmatic discussions of achievement data have generated a keen interest in using data for improvement.

McElhatton told me he has been

> amazed at the power of those discussion groups. I would hear teachers say "This is the first time I've had an opportunity like this, to have this dialogue with my colleagues. Now I can see that certain of my colleagues aren't doing as well as they might and so how can we help that person to do better?"

Data and its analysis do not have to be off-putting. We should not be surprised that the seminars are extremely well attended and get high marks. Ninety-five percent of the participants rate them as either valuable or very valuable. I am reminded of Michael Fullan's finding that improvement and accountability, done right, can energize both teachers and administrators. At first, administrators tend to be more interested in data. Once the initiative is underway, teachers *are the most insistent on gathering and examining the results of their efforts*. Good change processes promote the desire to get better results (Fullan, 1991) (emphasis added).

When we give teachers the opportunity to see even gradual improvements through the use of data, they can become passionate advocates of the system. MPS experienced such a sea change when data became a source of dialogue for improvement.

## The Treasure Hunt: Getting Data Out of the File Drawer

In the main, McElhatton has found that "schools don't look at test results, because so much of it is in an obtuse format that is hard to use." This echoes something that I once heard in a moment of candor from an official at one of the prominent norm-referenced test manufacturers. Annual test reports, with their multiple tables, formats, and breakdowns, usually serve to confuse administrators and practitioners. He surmised that these reports were not doing enough to help schools improve. As McElhatton notes, the arcane nature of these test results almost ensures that "they get buried in file drawers and no one looks at them strategically."

Such is not the case at MPS. Now, test results get examined. Tim's office produces packets to aid

in this analysis. They contain no more than what is needed to plan for improvement, including longitudinal achievement for every tested area in the MPS School Accountability Plan, which Reeves helped to design.

One of the more mystifying realities of schools in an age of accountability is our failure to get the right data into every practitioner's hands and to set a date for it to be analyzed by teachers with their colleagues. The average teacher will tell you they are *not* given a report of achievement data to review for annual improvement planning. No wonder they have difficulty aligning efforts and staff development with the urgent learning needs of students.

The data packet MPS teachers receive contains "Treasure Hunt" materials to help resolve such issues. The Treasure Hunt consists of several worksheets tailored to elementary, middle, or high school. The Treasure Hunt, designed in an inductive manner, designates the most essential questions with an asterisk. Note the following sample:

> WSAS Reading Percentile Ranks 1996–97
> Grade 4 (Green Packet, p. 5)
> 4. What is the relationship between MPS scores on the WSAS Grade 4 Reading and the national percentile?

As in Adlai Stevenson (Chapter 1), such comparisons provoke just the sort of reflection that improvement demands. This one question defines precisely the relative standing of the school's performance, provokes a mental review of factors that could account for it, and leads to a consideration of gaps between this school's performance and that of other schools with similar advantages or disadvantages.

The logic and psychology of this question are obvious. The focus on improvement is forged through formal comparisons, review, and reflection on relative and potential status.

## Beyond the Annual Glance

Despite the patent benefits of such review, many low-achieving schools do not see the need for more than an annual glance at data by just a few school personnel—typically the school improvement team. My findings indicate that many schools conduct some form of review that is briefly done, quickly forgotten, and not acted on.

Sometimes we do just enough analysis to conclude that socioeconomic factors account for most of the differences in achievement. We fail to see what measurable gaps in learning represent opportunities for targeted action that can overcome socioeconomic "inevitabilities." Writing out and reviewing these differences with our peers is essential.

Achievement data contain an important slice of reality. The data allow us to see specific, concrete opportunities found in abundance even on the much-maligned standardized tests. Looking at achievement reports—getting them off the shelf—is great. But analyzing and actually listing opportunities far more effectively focuses a team on areas of strength and weakness. Such processes are typical of successful schools, including MPS. Figure 2.1 shows another section of the Treasure Hunt.

Notice the brutal, binary simplicity of both the questions and the format. This type of exercise marks the beginning of school improvement. It sets a number of collective, results-oriented actions in motion. It moves information from the "interesting" category and into the "urgent" category. If graphic organizers are an aid to learning for kids (Marzano, 1998), they are no less so for adults. The format of the worksheet in Figure 2.1 makes the analysis compelling, easy to view, and simple to act on. In the section in Figure 2.2, page 36, note how the form confronts the participant in a similar way.

Data make the invisible become visible. As Figure 2.2 shows, the important realities behind these figures cannot be avoided when they are

FIGURE 2.1 TREASURE HUNT 1

WSAS 1997–98 Results: Objectives Performance by District/School, By Academic Subject.

Item 31. • According to the 1997–98 WSAS results, "Percent of Students Mastering Each Objective," what are the areas of strength and weakness in each subject area for the district and for your school? Complete the following:

**FOR YOUR SCHOOL**

*Reading*
Strength _____
Strength _____
Weakness _____
Weakness _____

*Language*
Strength _____
Strength _____
Weakness _____
Weakness _____

*Math*
Strength _____
Strength _____
Weakness _____
Weakness _____

*Science*
Strength _____
Strength _____
Weakness _____
Weakness _____

*Social Studies*
Strength _____
Strength _____
Weakness _____
Weakness _____

*Source*: Copyright 1999. Center for Performance Assessment, Denver, Colorado (phone: 1-800-844-6599). Used by permission.

juxtaposed in a way that reveals and provokes strong contrasts. The exercise, which requires active, written participation from the practitioner, does much of the work for us and for management without being heavy-handed.

The principal value of such worksheets is their promotion of dialogue and reflection, which lead to a sense of urgency, awareness, and targeted, practical action. The following is another recurrent piece, found in several sections of the Treasure Hunt:

> If you were to take part in a discussion with your colleagues about student achievement, what questions about strategies for teaching reading might you ask of other schools in the district? What strategies would you share if you were asked?

Such questions presume that there is much to share with and learn from our colleagues. *The experts are among us.* In Figure 2.3, lines numbered 1–5 enable teachers and teams to list conclusions about student achievement in their school, based on a review of the school's data.

Such material promotes a commonsense approach that has yet to become a routine practice. The simplicity of the format belies the strong focus that it brings to collective thinking and intelligent planning.

In Figure 2.3, I like the way the wording equates problem areas of need with areas of greatest potential growth. As Michael Fullan has said so often in presentations, "Problems are our friends."

FIGURE 2.2 TREASURE HUNT 2

**WSAS Writing Test Results Grade 4 (Green Packet, p. 3)**

Item:
1. What are the average percentile ranks of African American and White Grade 4 students on WSAS for narrative, descriptive and informative writing?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| African American | Narrative: _____ | Descriptive:_____ | Informative: _____ |
| White | Narrative: _____ | Descriptive:_____ | Informative: _____ |

- What ethnic differences do you observe in Grade 4 writing on the 1996-1997 WSAS Writing component in narrative, descriptive and informative writing?
- Identify one inference you can draw from this data.

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FIGURE 2.3 TREASURE HUNT 3

**Needs Analysis**

Using your school's data, identify the areas in which your school's academic achievement needs the most improvement. Identify areas of greatest potential growth.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Source: Copyright 2000. Center for Performance Assessment, Denver, Colorado (phone: 1-800-844-6599). Used by permission.

Although the MPS seminars are confrontational and challenging, 95 percent of the participants give high marks to them. People need and like focused and tangible challenges, especially when they can work with colleagues toward the predictable benefit of kids.

## Celebrating MPS Success Stories

McElhatton's process reveals something else that might also explain its popularity. It creates opportunities to celebrate gains and successes One section of the Treasure Hunt asks us to identify an area, using the data, where there has been an improvement of 10 percent or greater in student performance. It then asks: "What are some conclusions that can be deduced and that could help

explain the differences in student performance in the following areas?"

Space is provided for elementary reading, writing, math, and science. This not only promotes collective reflection, it gives practitioners the chance to savor and celebrate their advances—and the factors that account for them.

The MPS packet provides not only simple, no-nonsense training materials, but also graphic material to use for the celebration and reinforcement of success. Several prepared slides in the packet already have the heading "MPS Success Stories" printed on them. The following examples are displayed boldly and prominently at schools:

- Greenfield—123 percent improvement in African American student math scores.
- Cass—80 percent improvement in writing scores.
- Bruce—108 percent improvement in male reading scores.

Celebration figures prominently as an essential piece of annual planning, like the improvement planning process a group of us developed in two Arizona districts. (See Appendix A.) Achieving goals and celebrating successes are the reasons for being in this business.

## From Data Analysis to Goal-Setting: Getting Goals Right

> An effective goal focuses primarily on results rather than on activity. It identifies where you want to be . . . and it tells you when you have arrived. It unifies your efforts and energy.
>
> —STEPHEN COVEY (1991)

We now move from "Needs Analysis" to "Goal Selection." Although choosing goals might seem easy, the potential for difficulty here should not be ignored, as MPS can testify.

Let's be clear: It is always best for the school or team to set their own goals, based on their own analysis of performance data. But we have to ensure that the way they are set—the parameters for setting them—ensure alignment between effort and desired results. I've seen districts stress that goals be manageable, measurable, and focused on student learning—and still the goals come in unintentionally muddy and unwieldy. The pattern that produces such goals is strong and hard to overcome (Schmoker, 1999, pp. 29–31).

We have learned—the hard way—that successful schools and districts write goals that look remarkably similar. (See Appendix B for a useful template for writing effective goals.) In the following excerpts from their Data-Driven Seminar materials, consider how MPS makes setting and writing goals a straightforward process:

**1. Define the criteria for goals.** The Data-Driven Seminar materials contain a section, "Answer these Questions Before You Create Target Goals." The material is appropriately repetitive for the sake of clarity. The following questions are included: "Are they [the goals] based on comprehensive analysis of student performance? Did your school take into account the current levels of student performance?"

This emphasis on the data guards against seemingly impressive, but actually quite imprecise goals. "We will introduce more technology [or] hands-on activities into the curriculum" might sound good, but such activities do not spring from or address weaknesses revealed in student performance data. The Data-Driven Seminar materials require goals that are measurable and grounded in "performance based indicators of student's achievement of these goals." Other questions in the section point to the need for goals that are "consistent with district expectations or goals for student learning." This refers to the board and the district's long-term, measurable benchmarks that are

established for each district and for the state assessments of the MPS Accountability Plan.

Likewise, the Treasure Hunt reinforces the criteria for goals that are "specific, measurable, and achievable and include a defined timetable." I am reminded of a workshop participant who shared this definition: "A goal is a dream with a deadline."

Such criteria prevent the broad, meaningless goals that researcher Grady McGonagill (1992) criticizes: "Annual goals statements that emerge from school improvement efforts are rarely linked to student achievement. . . . [Such goals] *seldom challenge the basic elements of practice*" (emphasis added). The seemingly simple act of writing goals is central to the clarity and the quality of the goal. It can make or break successful improvement efforts.

Definitions are great. Definitions accompanied by illustrative examples, however, are even better. The following example illustrates that point.

**2. Provide examples of effective goals.** The School Accountability Plan contains several important pages. Tier I goals reflect the long-term district-wide targets for achievement on state assessments. They act as a "menu" of reminders and reference points when schools set their own goals, called Tier II goals. As with the Treasure Hunt, consultant Doug Reeves played a significant role in the design and content of the plan. Here is a sample goal from Tier II:

> **Elementary Menu: E.1 Mathematics Achievement**
>
> 1. Increase the percentage of ____ (specify a particular group) students who score at or above the proficient level on the Grade-Level 4 WSAS Assessment (and compare with spring 1999 and spring 2000).

## Loose-Tight Oversight

Each of the Data-Driven Seminar menus, "approved by the accountability task force," can be used as a template. The menus help ensure that goals come out right. Such an approach to goals also exhibits the important loose-tight structures that Peters and Waterman (1982) emphasize: Guidelines that guide, but allow for a certain measure of autonomy.

We can see this in how the explicit guidelines for setting goals are offset in two important ways. First, notice that the district *does not* set the annual goals or measurable targets. They are selected by the school from a menu of options based on its own analysis of data. Next, the message is reinforced with an appeals process. Note the following excerpt: "If your school has another school-based accountability indicator which you would like to use, but which is not included on the menu, please contact the Office of Research and Assessment for approval of format, content, and rigor from the Accountability Task Force."

Approval for a sensible alternative to the menu is just a phone call away. This flexibility promotes mutual respect and makes room for the creative invention that is at the heart of improvement.

## Goals—Not "Overload"

Many of the schools tackle only one or two achievement goals annually to prevent the overload that is so clearly the enemy of improvement (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996, pp. 3–4). Support for the limitation on the number of goals comes from the MPS district office. According to Mary Lamping, former director of research and assessment,

> It helps that MPS has set some boundaries. If there are too many goals, people are thinking, "How will we ever do this?". . . . The district has to recognize reality. They have to use the data to be able to ask questions like, "Why are we doing well in reading but lousy in math?" So they might set a goal—just one goal— for math.

As this shows, just as overload is the enemy of improvement, the use of data becomes the enemy of overload (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

McElhatton speaks in a similar way about the value of selecting only one academic area for improvement. When teachers ask him how they can generate success in other areas, he points out that what they learn about instruction during one year benefits subsequent years. These benefits, he believes, are not lost. Instead, the single-goal focus "establishes a base . . . an accumulation of knowledge that grows over the years." Moreover, emphasis in one area results in vestigial benefits for other subject areas. Many of the 90/90/90 schools, with their singular emphasis on reading, realized slight or even significant increases in *every subject area*.

Such results should not be surprising, according to author and educational consultant Emily Calhoun, who believes in "the power of one goal" (Sparks, 1999, p. 54). Focused and compelling learning goals that are limited in number provide the impetus for success.

## A Measurable Mission Statement

We might also consider how the MPS mission statement fosters the right kind of orientation for reaching goals. The MPS mission statement, one of the best I have come across, acts very much like an effective—and public—goal:

> **Milwaukee Public Schools will be the first urban school district where all students reach high standards.**

The MPS mission statement sends a ringing message regarding the achievement of measurable, standards-based gains—on a timetable. For former Assistant Superintendent Tom McGinnity, the effect of this new commitment was worth the time and discussion it required from staff throughout the district. Like an effective goal, the mission statement began to inform decisions and practices.

McGinnity saw immediately how it "produced great energy" and fostered a new, more focused mindset:

> We could now ask, "How does your work support this goal?" There was no more foolishness, no more acceptance of, say, field trips that had no connection to learning goals. . . . It gave us buy-in and the first budget that followed our goals.

Where "goals" or "mission" are defined broadly, communication and action lack focus, difficult decisions are postponed, and opportunities are overlooked. Instructional management is always difficult when the system lacks focus—where "anything goes."

But a measurable emphasis on achievement—through measurable goals and MPS's virtually "measurable" mission statement—promotes focused, decisive action. Is it a coincidence that the following initiatives were undertaken in the wake of MPS's collective commitment to becoming the "first urban school district where all students reach high standards"?

- Student performance data analyzed systematically and collectively at every school—to set measurable achievement goals.
- Personnel creatively reassigned to enable the district's most effective teachers and special education staff to help low-achieving readers.
- Students grouped strategically to allow for more small-group instruction for the lowest-achieving kids.
- Schools remained open in the evenings for tutoring sessions—from 6 to 9 p.m.—to accommodate student schedules.
- Grant funds found to provide tutoring services for 1,500 students in the first year and up to 20,000 students in successive years. The extra help enabled many of these students to improve their achievement.
- Summer school and tutoring services provided *in neighborhood schools* resulted in a marked increase in attendance.

Only clear targets can overcome bureaucratic inertia to compel such paradigm-busting changes

They compel change by vividly revealing the gap between the actual and ideal.

## Goal-Driven Teamwork

Powerful goals influence productive and focused collaboration (Little, 1987, pp. 494–495). Organizations will not meet ambitious goals when people work entirely alone. MPS found that teachers at the district's highest achieving schools met regularly to share strategies for improving instruction. Such conversations, according to Lamping and Jocklyn Smith (Director of Curriculum and Instruction), focus on how to reach the measurable goals. Smith points out that they work hard to create collaborative times "within the school day to talk about goals and to talk about whether they are achieving the goals." Smith finds these meetings surprisingly intense, echoing McElhatton's amazement "at the power of . . . discussion groups" in the Data-Driven Seminars he conducts.

## Carving Out Collaboration and Harvesting Expertise

According to Mary Lamping, structure and planning are essential:

> The successful schools don't leave collaboration up to chance. The old way was to have sporadic pockets of teaming. Those with the initiative did it. Those without it didn't. It wasn't planned, wasn't forecasted. That doesn't happen now. What we found was that you can't move forward if you don't plan for it. Collaboration has to be planned and scheduled ahead of time. . . .
>
> School leaders began to push for time to be built into the school day. . . . They juggled schedules and used support staff and specialists to create as much as two hours for grade-level teams to meet on a regular basis during the school day. Sometimes the principal would sit in on the meeting. . . . Administration has to help set the structure for teaming. You must talk about curriculum, write up the minutes for the meeting so that the teams know what other teams are doing. We found ways to schedule teaming around special presentations and assemblies. . . . It is crucial for us to create the environment for productive collaboration by setting and carving out these times.

In what reads like a description of what we want to happen among teacher teams, Pearce Elementary School Principal Alice Somers notes:

> We have grade-level meetings at least once a month. Each team has a leader. I meet with the grade-level leaders once a week. Our teams are always sharing their successes and helping each other out. One of the key benefits of this teamwork is that the teams have formulated some really excellent units of instruction. Because they plan together, the curriculum has improved. They refine whatever is working and toss out what doesn't work. They also meet during the summer right after school is out. . . . They don't close their doors. The teams observe each other when implementing new programs or practices, like reciprocal teaching or our new math program.

Similarly, Principal Jim Sonnenberg, of MPS's Westside Academy, also sits in on meetings regularly. He emphasizes the importance of letting teams experiment with new methods and programs to get the best results. According to Sonnenberg:

> Teamwork empowers teachers. It helps them take ownership and control. The academic teams meet every other week to discuss ways to improve test scores and to deliver curriculum. The teams report back to me. If there is a certain area of deficiency, they come up with suggestions for improvement and put it on a timeline. They elect a chairperson and a recorder. The focus is on meeting the grade-level outcomes. The question for them is always "How will we test these expectations?" This takes place along the way, not just at the end of the year. We have created our own monitoring forms to keep teachers focused.

> We used to give edicts like, "Here's what you'll do." Then teachers would begin to say, "This won't work with these kids." So now we pilot. We visit other successful schools. One program, Science Research Associates (SRA), had a lot of direct instruction, which some teachers didn't like. So we used it in just one classroom at each grade level. The other classes continued to use a popular reading series. By the end of the year, we didn't even have to sit down and discuss results. Even though many teachers didn't like the SRA—it was kind of dry for some of them—they saw how kids could now do things they had never done before. All year, they could see it on our assessments. Others were saying, "Boy, my children can't do that."
>
> When we looked at end-of-year comparisons, not one teacher asked for a transfer. They knew it was good for children. Now we're doing it in math. These decisions should not always be made at the central office, but should be made from pilots at the schools.

Other school administrators talked about ways to severely limit informational items at staff meetings. This creates time for resident specialists to share and monitor effective strategies in reading.

But as exciting as any of this, is the fact that at the district level, they have begun to capture and catalogue the fruits of this teamwork by gathering and disseminating effective strategies in reading and math. These strategies are contained, by grade level, in a document entitled—appropriately—*Teaching Strategies for Major Points of Alignment.* In this way, they are "harvesting," rather than hoarding, in-house expertise—as teachers in other countries have been doing for years (Stigler and Hiebert 1999).

## Collective Autonomy

As important as structure and purpose are to effective collaboration, one of the dangers of meetings is the front-loading of the agenda. This deprives the group of the autonomy needed to react and respond to its most urgent or emergent needs. Sometimes we forget that the purpose—the real agenda—of a team meeting is not to cover a set of topics, but more importantly to *continuously generate solutions to instructional problems in order to get better results.* As Lamping points out:

> You can't designate the entire agenda. Administration can set the general agenda—a focus on improvement. But you have to allow teachers to meet their own emergent needs.

At any number of team meetings, I have seen urgent, specific student difficulties get squeezed out of the agenda by a series of general topics set early on or from afar. These seldom have any effect on student learning or its improvement. Then the team does not get around to specific areas of difficulty, such as *measurement or introductory paragraphs,* that give students fits. A rough schedule of specific skills that are determined through data analysis is the best start. Brazosport (see Chapter 5) does this well and in a systematic way.

We should make room for "just in time" topics, like subskills that might not emerge as difficulties until teachers are actually immersed in a teaching unit. Or there may be times when the team realizes that the problem is not explicitly revealed in test-score data. For example, their kids simply are not spending sufficient time reading—*just reading*—during and after the school day. As a result, strategies for increasing the time spent reading become the topic for the next meeting or two. Clear opportunities for improvement cannot be sacrificed to an overly rigid, pre-set schedule.

Lamping also recommends the use of monitoring: "You do want to require the minutes and the data collection" on progress being made as a result of the team's strategies. "Ultimately, the team, not the agenda, is holding it all together. Teams should be meeting at least once a week in a structured environment."

## Overcoming Obstacles to Teamwork

Author and researcher Judith Little (1987) wrote revealingly of how the average group of teachers does not easily or immediately work in a productive fashion. Lamping adds, "It is rare that all teachers want to communicate. It will always be difficult for professionals to admit that they are struggling." Fortunately, ongoing, persistent involvement in structured, goal-oriented teamwork allows teachers to see that all teachers have something to learn from their colleagues. As Lamping states,

> No individual can solve every problem. . . . This isn't a reflection on me as a teacher. Eventually, everyone there will have an idea and that gives all of them confidence to ask for help. Maybe one of us has a trick or a better way to do something. This happens all the time.

Such dialogue also holds true for administrators. McGinnity finds that many administrators think they are supposed to know it all and do it all:

> Administrators cannot expect to know it all. An administrator cannot fathom the details, because they don't live it. The ideas have to come from those closest to the work. And that's where it ought to be done.

Once these obstacles are overcome, school personnel undergo a transformation. Initially a hard sell, staff meetings become intense and productive times. Jocklynn Smith, struck by the intensity of the interaction of the teams, observed: "You don't even want to interrupt those team meetings. You would feel like you're intruding. If you are going to interrupt them, it better be for something really urgent."

Administrators are present during many of the meetings. Smith found that the team meetings helped both the teachers and the administrators to "know exactly what we are teaching and why we are teaching it—and if it connects to the school's improvement goal." I have seen how observing team meetings provides administrators with one of the most accurate and efficient means to support and gauge the actual health of the school's improvement efforts. Simply wandering from team to team during a 30-minute meeting can quickly reveal the extent of each team's strategic thinking about the areas of difficulty or whether effective follow-up and ongoing assessment are occurring. Briefly sitting in on a team meeting can even help administrators gauge a team's attitude and energy level.

## Teamwork: The Common Denominator

One of the most daunting obstacles to effective collaboration is the tendency to sell it short. People—not silver-bullet programs—are our best hope. Lamping emphasizes that the essence of Milwaukee's success does not revolve around packaged programs. Although many such programs, such as Writing to Read, Accelerated Reader, Junior Great Books, and Target Teach, have been useful, homegrown expertise and refinement is still the most underestimated resource in instructional improvement. Always on the lookout for the next program, we fail to consider why many so-called "research-based programs" too often fail: because of our inability to cultivate and capture teacher expertise *as we implement such programs*. Lamping notes that collective trial and error generate MPS's most successful lessons and strategies.

Even the best programs cannot successfully be implemented without teamwork. We learned this the hard way in Lake Havasu School District in Lake Havasu City, Arizona, with Success For All and Accelerated Reader, both fine programs. There will never be a substitute for local, ongoing discussion that ensures—and even invents—solutions and refinements to the implementation of *any* program.

So far, we have seen how teams benefit from a clear focus on goals, which results from simple, systematic, and guided analysis of student performance data. These emphases and procedures,

however, do not occur spontaneously. It is laudable that despite the political and administrative turnover at MPS over the years, certain key emphases, understandings, and practices *have endured*. Five years after being introduced by Doug Reeves, the Data-Driven Seminars, so central to their improvement, established a beachhead. Both attendance and participant satisfaction with the seminars remain high. Moreover, achievement remains higher than ever.

Lamping, who formerly worked at the central office and is now an assistant principal, related the pride a teacher expressed: "MPS does not just jump on the latest bandwagon. We stay the course." Wow. What a great litmus test: to see how many of our teachers report that their district "stays the course."

## Again: Leadership Is as Leadership Does

Like Stevenson and other school districts that are discussed in this book, MPS demonstrates successful leadership as a function of simple actions, which promote successful results. Such leadership only occurs in a fraction of our schools. Consider the following leadership practices derived from MPS and its success, which can be replicated at virtually any school or district:

• **Take advantage of the mission or the vision statement's capacity to be more than an empty slogan.** Note how MPS's mission statement acts as a goad. It demands action and accomplishment with its emphasis on results. As McGinnity pointed out, it "produced great energy" and gave them "the ability to focus and not get derailed." It made it easier to include a profound question in the leader's arsenal for organizational change: "Does this effort or initiative clearly support our learning goals?"

• **Train and involve *all teaching staff* in annual data analysis and goal-setting procedures.** Teachers *want* to improve. Data analysis and goal setting honor that desire. We forego our best opportunity to promote ownership by depriving teachers of participation in these essential procedures. Data and analysis are the professional educator's right and responsibility. Goal-setting needs to be taught: It is key to the establishment and explication of clear, measurable criteria for success. This instruction should include clear, illustrative examples of effective goals. Place limits on the number of goals for teams to prevent the debilitating overload that unravels many potentially effective improvement efforts.

• **Train building administrators in just a few, but essential supervisory practices.** They should know how to:

– Visit a classroom to see if teaching activities are in line with assessed standards and learning goals. According to Smith, the effective school administrators "are able to see immediately if the teacher is teaching to the goals set that year."

– Evaluate a team meeting for effectiveness and results-orientation. Administrators should be urged to sit in on—or walk around during—team meetings regularly.

– Publicly recognize and celebrate effective teamwork: Applaud any progress, or strategy, or idea that teams produce—briefly but often—at staff meetings.

– Conduct brief but regular meetings with teacher teams for the purpose of reviewing evidence of student progress, offering resources and assistance where needed to meet year-end goals.

Any administrator could learn to do these things—with ever-greater effectiveness. Success in these areas does not require a doctorate in curriculum. Both the administrator and the teacher can begin to learn the moment they focus on the simple question: *"How does this help us to meet the learning goals that we have set?"*

With minimal guidance, I have seen stunning progress made by administrators and teachers in their ability to evaluate the quality of early reading instruction. In touring some 300 classrooms in the past few years, I have seen a 15-minute briefing enable administrators to trenchantly critique their school's early-reading program *in less than an hour*. Focus facilitates perception: When we have a clear sense of what to look for, we see things previously obscured by distractions and a lack of confidence.

The accomplishments achieved by MPS are exceptional by any standard. The difference was a focus on results. As one principal recalls, buy-in was initially "like pulling teeth, until they saw the big jump in student achievement." Districts like MPS point us to a possible future where a change in administration doesn't have to mean the abandonment of proven results-oriented procedures. MPS's success demonstrates that logical procedures, combined with a concern for kids, enable us to give them the best we have, with the best we know.

➤ *For more information, contact Tim McElhatton, Senior Evaluator, Milwaukee Public Schools, P.O. Box 2181, 5225 W. Vliet St., Milwaukee, WI 53201; phone: 414-475-8258.*

# Vignettes 5 and 6

## Vignette 5

Trish Donovan is the former principal (1995–99) at Metz Elementary School in the Adams County School District in Westminster, Colorado, near Denver. The Colorado State Assessment Program (CSAP) is administered to students in the 3rd and 4th grades.

Trish Donovan reports:

In the fall of 1998, only 40 percent of our students achieved a proficient score on the CSAP in writing. Although 50 percent of our students received free and reduced-price lunch and 59 percent are minority students, we still expected more from them and from ourselves. Disappointed and discouraged, the staff looked for answers. We wondered why our efforts did not pay off. The teachers at Metz worked diligently and taught thematically. We considered our learning environment safe, orderly, and child centered.

As principal, I spent the summer pondering this difficult issue. I also talked to colleagues about what they did to achieve success in their schools. By chance, I learned about Mike Schmoker's book, *Results*. It prompted me to dig deeper into our data. From our data, I realized that our children exhibited particular weakness in just a few areas. It occurred to me that if we measured student progress every month in these areas, our results would improve.

When the staff returned in August, I greeted them with a renewed sense of determination and a plan. I proposed that we follow Schmoker's approach to hold monthly team meetings where we identified goals, rubrics, and strategies that aligned our instruction with our expectations. At first, we felt like awkward actors following an unfamiliar script. Nevertheless, we persevered.

We faced many challenges along the way. Some teachers did not think they needed to assess their students. The fact that many students scored far below grade level and used English as a second language, discouraged teachers. It became evident that we lacked practice in collegial problem solving to align our monthly goals with our end-of-year outcomes. After hearing Mike speak, I returned to our team meetings understanding the question we needed to ask: "What will it take to get more students to proficiency?"

I began to identify student needs through data analysis, meet with teachers regularly, and provide targeted staff development. I monitored instruction through observation and evaluation. I set short-term targets with teachers that were tied into our annual achievement goals.

So what happened? Our hopé to improve our scores on the CSAP in writing by 10–15 percent succeeded in a dramatic way. The *Denver Post* and the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* reported that our students scored 32 percentage points higher than the year before. We ranked among the top three schools in the metro area to achieve such a large gain. When I announced this news over the public address system, the entire school poured into the halls of our small, modest school. Everyone cheered, and the teachers hugged each other.

We learned a number of lessons—that we did not have to sacrifice our principles about teaching to achieve our goals for students, that we had to be rigorous in measuring student achievement, that we needed to align our instruction with what we were measuring. The best lesson of all was that we learned, as Joan Richardson (1999) of the National Staff Development Council says, "High poverty doesn't have to mean low performance."

> ➤ *For further information, contact Trish Donovan, now Principal of Centennial Elementary School, 3306 W. Barry Ave., Littleton, CO 80123; phone: 347-4425.*

# Vignette 6

Nancy Newsome is principal at Kerman-Floyd Elementary School in the Kerman Unified School District, a small K–12 district near Fresno, California. Lloyd Wamhof was formerly the superintendent of Kerman Unified School District. It was my privilege to visit the Kerman schools several times during the 1998–99 and 1999–2000 school years. One of our most productive activities was to tour the early-grade classrooms to see if there were opportunities to add power, focus, and consistency to the reading program. Districtwide, Kerman made consistent and impressive gains at every level in the past two years, with some especially significant gains in the early grades at both elementary schools.

Nancy Newsome reports:

Kerman-Floyd Elementary School attributes its positive Stanford 9 test score gains to collaboration, concentration, and consistency. The table represents growth on the Stanford 9 achievement test between 1998 and 2000:

**Gains in Stanford 9 Percentile Scores: 1998–2000**

| *Grade* | *Reading* | *Growth* | *Language* | *Growth* | *Spelling* | *Growth* | *Math* | *Growth* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 30% to 51% | +21 | 28% to 53% | +25 | 28% to 49% | +21 | 34% to 67% | +33 |
| 3 | 26% to 50% | +24 | 30% to 54% | +24 | 31% to 62% | +31 | 43% to 67% | +24 |
| 4 | 33% to 36% | +3 | 37% to 45% | +8 | 28% to 39% | +11 | 39% to 54% | +15 |
| 5 | 29% to 34% | +5 | 37% to 41% | +4 | 34% to 44% | +10 | 33% to 45% | +12 |
| 6 | 39% to 50% | +11 | 44% to 50% | +6 | 35% to 50% | +15 | 50% to 55% | +5 |

**Collaboration**

Teachers met as grade levels to review standards, align standards to the curriculum—and they went a step further. They divided the standards into trimester units and then wrote, or incorporated published unit tests, for each trimester. Students were assessed each trimester with rewards, certificates, and pins for their accomplishments. Each teacher, knowing exactly what would be assessed, could develop his lesson plans. Monthly grade-level meetings focused on accomplishments and what worked for teachers that produced better results. Teachers came

together as grade-level units, sharing materials and ideas. They took time to plan daily lessons, monthly lessons and trimester lessons together.

Each teacher met with the principal to review her individual SAT 9 test results and made plans for improvement. About midway through the year, the principal met with the teachers again to discuss the progress being made, making adjustments as needed, getting staff development as needed, and ordering materials as needed.

### Consistency

A two-hour reading block was established where the total school (K–6 grades) focuses on phonemic awareness, explicit phonics instruction, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading practice from 8:10 to 10:10 a.m. daily. If a visitor tours the campus, he will see the same structure from classroom to classroom.

The end-of-trimester tests for each level in language arts, math, and writing kept the teachers focused and insured that all students at a grade level were held accountable for the same outcomes, no matter whose classroom they were assigned to.

Materials and programs, such as MathSteps, Daily Oral Language, Daily Oral Math, and Daily Oral Geography, were consistent throughout each respective grade level. Teachers got together to develop their own activity booklets to match the assessment format and the outcomes desired for each trimester.

### Concentration

At the beginning of the school year, the teachers clustered as grade levels and analyzed their respective Stanford 9 test results. They specifically looked at the content clusters, analyzing where students were having the most difficulty. They selected one reading content cluster and one math content cluster to focus on. This became their focus goal for the year, in addition to the overall goal of improving our scores by 5 percent. It was felt that by focusing on the two content clusters, the overall scores would improve by 5 percent. As the teachers met by grade levels throughout the year, they discussed and developed ways to ensure mastery of the focus goals. Posters were generated by the students, using the information. These posters were displayed in the classrooms for the students to refer to on a daily basis.

The teachers knew what would be tested and how it would be tested and developed their lessons from there.

Collaboration, consistency, and concentration—It sounds so simple. It truly is. And it's highly effective: The results prove it.

➤ *For further information, contact Nancy Newsome, Principal, Kerman-Floyd Elementary School, 1465 W. "F" St., Kerman, CA 93630; phone: 559-846-5383.*

# 3 Oak Park Schools: A Genius for Information Management

> The beauty of the system is that if all you do is publish the patterns and make them public, it's obvious what's going on. No one has to say anything to change behavior.
>
> —Gary Marx, assistant superintendent of instruction, Oak Park School District

> What gets measured doesn't necessarily get done. What gets measured and discussed on a regular basis has a better chance of getting done.
>
> —From Oak Park training materials

Oak Park School District is on the northern boundary of Detroit, Michigan. In the past 15 years, the Oak Park community has undergone significant demographic change. Residents are primarily African American. There are a small number of white residents from Appalachia and increasing numbers of immigrants from the Middle East and Russia. The district has an enrollment of 3,376 students, who attend four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. More than 40 percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced-cost lunch.

Like all the districts we have examined, the turnaround that Oak Park experienced demonstrates the power of a data-driven improvement effort; focused, standards-based dialogue; and simple, compelling goals. It is important that Oak Park's information management system provides data in an easily accessible and powerful way. At the same time, Oak Park maintains an emphatically humane, nonthreatening work environment. It was gratifying to discover that *Results* (Schmoker, 1996) was of some influence in Oak Park's journey to school improvement.

Oak Park ranks among the most-improved school districts in an already-improving state. The state of Michigan, along with North Carolina and Texas, received the highest achievement gains in the United States, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). In the words of Joan Richardson, National Staff Development Council (NSDC):

> The district has gone from a cellar-dweller on Michigan's mandatory achievement

tests to being recognized as one of the state's most improved districts. Oak Park now can brag about achievement scores as good as many nearby suburban districts and better than some.

The district's across-the-board improvement garnered Oak Park considerable attention, including a visit from Michigan's Governor John Engler. Like Brazosport, a school we study in Chapter 5, those schools in Oak Park with the highest poverty rates—between 80 and 90 percent—are now achieving at about the same high levels as the more advantaged schools in the Oak Park district.

## Results: Oak Park's Longitudinal Data

A critical look at the following data reveals Oak Park's success:

**Percentage of Students At or Above Proficiency Levels on the MEAP**

| *Elementary Schools* | *1994* | *1999* |
|---|---|---|
| Reading | 20.7% | 52.4% |
| Math | 26.1% | 55.6% |

*Note*: MEAP = Michigan Educational Assessment Program.

Although Oak Park deliberately chose to concentrate efforts on reading and math improvement, their science scores increased from 16.1 percent of students achieving proficiency in 1996, to 27.4 percent in 1999.

| *Middle Schools* | *1994* | *1999* |
|---|---|---|
| *Percentage of Students Achieving Proficiency* | | |
| Reading | 15.2% | 37.3% |
| Math | 15.2% | 86.1% |
| Science | 6.8% | 17.7% |

Despite these gains, the middle schools struggled with consistency in the area of reading. In 1996, 50 percent of the students were at the Satisfactory/Proficient level. Their achievements in math, on the other hand, are clearly extraordinary—going from 15.2 percent to 86.1 percent achieving proficiency (see previous table).

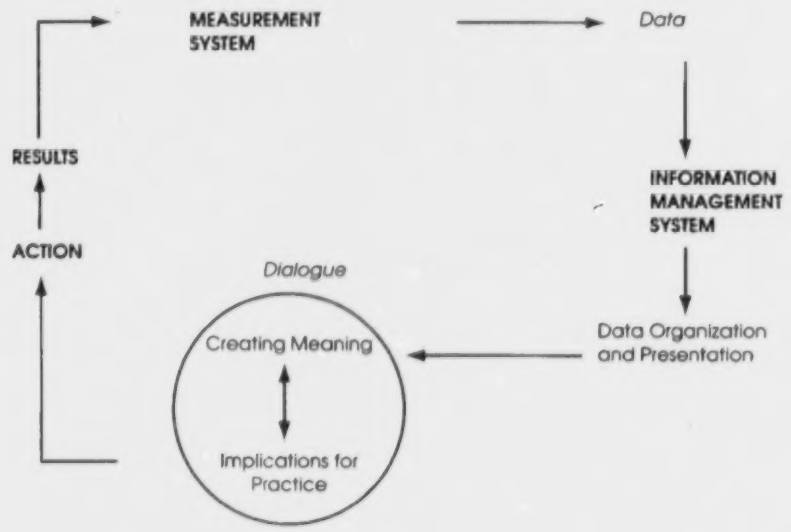
| *High School* | *1994* | *1999* |
|---|---|---|
| *Percentage of Students Achieving Proficiency* | | |
| Reading | 20.3% | 56.6% |
| Math | 3.1% | 62.1% |
| Science | 6.8% | 62.4% |

Most noteworthy for me, the significant increases at the high school level have been *virtually uninterrupted in every subject area* since 1994.

Despite some setbacks, the districtwide trend is inexorably positive. For the last five years, Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) scores for all subjects and at all levels increased almost 80 percent of the time—sometimes dramatically. Since 1994, the number of K–12 students succeeding in reading almost tripled. In math, scores quadrupled. At the high school level, often slower to get on board, the improvement is stunning. Oak Park currently achieves more than many of their affluent suburban counterparts. As we will see, this accomplishment did not occur through an onerous or heavy-handed accountability. During this period of improvement, every group, including staff, community, and students, gave increasingly higher ratings to the district. Equally as interesting is Oak Park's awareness of their current plateau and what they now need to do to reach the next level of achievement.

As Assistant Superintendent Gary Marx told me, Oak Park did not improve with "silver bullet" programs. Instead, they eschewed such approaches and focused primarily on three things:

FIGURE 3.1 OVERVIEW




*Source:* Oak Park School District. Used by permission.

• The creation of a humane but rational environment, which allowed a powerful data management system to thrive.

• An insistence on reaching incremental, annual, measurable student achievement goals, measured against established, long-term goals.

• Professional dialogue focused on performance data to achieve results, and a refinement of instructional practices by teachers.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the heart of Oak Park's approach. All three elements converged to make a difference in Oak Park. For Marx, even greater progress will come as a result of more frequent, focused collaboration.

## History of a Turnaround: Start with Results

Oak Park's evolution reveals the importance of what researcher Susan Rosenholtz calls "rational planning." It begins with data and leads to the sharing of measurable achievement goals. Targeted collaboration focuses on ways to reach those goals (1991, p. 13).

Mired in low achievement, Oak Park created a new mechanism for improvement. It began with data collection and an objective, collective review by school personnel and members of the community. NSDC's Joan Richardson, my initial source of information about Oak Park, describes how their improvement effort began with John Porter, a former Michigan State superintendent of

instruction. At that time, he was head of the Institute for School Reform at Eastern Michigan University. Convinced that what he called "goal ambiguity" was all too common in public schools, Porter believed that it wrought exceptional havoc in urban settings (Marx, Hunter, & Johnson, 1997, p. 530). Porter's wisdom and his straightforward solution to this problem sums up the history of so much feckless, failed school reform:

> School reform should be driven by generation of the evidence. You should not even begin the school year *until you know the results of your work from the previous year* (Richardson, 1997, p. 1) (emphasis added).

It is dismaying that so much school improvement planning still occurs without giving *every teacher in the system* the chance to review and analyze the previous year's results. This failure accounts for McGonagill's observation: "The annual goal statements that emerge from school improvement efforts are rarely linked to student achievement" (1992).

Why? Because we too often fail to base our goals, in Porter's words, on "the results from the previous year." Even in a system seemingly flush with data—with grades and test reports—we are not, in truth, data driven. I am convinced that Porter's advice represents the single most important—and still overlooked—part of improvement planning.

## A Reverence for Data

Simple data that even a child could construe must take center stage in improvement planning; it can mightily influence organizational behavior. Data are the operative link to standards. Improved performance results from a cycle that begins with assessment data and their analysis. It then focuses on dialogue on ways to reach standards-based goals (Marx et al., p. 531). We are what we talk about. Data "frames the context for reflection and dialogue by the professional staff" (p. 536).

If there is anything we can learn from districts like Oak Park, it is that successful organizations do not just *collect data,* they *revere it.* They aren't satisfied with data until data have life and meaning for every teacher, every pertinent party. They use data to create and to ensure an objective, commonly held reality. Data must create what Margaret Wheatley (1994), in the language of particle physics, calls a "field." This is where random, spontaneous "particles," the dizzying array of numbers, graphs, and perceptions, compete for our attention and resources. The use of data allows for organized, *simplified* discussions that merge to create focused priorities and productive action.

Again, the initial impetus for improvement at Oak Park came from Porter's urging them to give the previous year's data the prominence and serious review it deserves. Everything they did at Oak Park began here. Any district could do these things without delay—but many still don't.

## A Simple Plan: From Quality Review to Collaborative Action

The collected data reflected 37 success indicators identified by representative members of the schools and the community. They used the data to judge the strengths and weaknesses of their existing efforts and programs. They could now convey to any interested party, *at a glance,* both what the district valued and where each school exhibited strong or weak tendencies.

Oak Park's carefully selected indicators included data on everything from achievement to attendance and from building safety to budgets. The urgent need for improvement received a big boost when their review revealed that the district rated "excellent" in only one category and "high need" in 22 others. (Other, intermediate categories were "moderate need" and "satisfactory.") It was a defining moment. Marx found that this data-collection and analysis process

> focused the energy of the organization on the goals. Once you begin a process like this, it's amazing how similarly everyone defines success! Rather than everyone beating each other up, the process highlights similarities and leads to common commitment.

Porter encouraged them not to dissipate their energy but to concentrate on a *limited number of goals*. They made reading their first priority, based on their analysis of the vestigial effect reading improvement often has on other academic areas. Another propitious move included the appointment of Gary Marx, then a highly respected building principal, to oversee the improvement initiative full time.

Marx had his greatest effect in the crucial and often misunderstood area of data. Although Oak Park did not suffer from a shortage of numerical data, Marx noted the insufficiency of their measurement system. He proposed an information management system as a replacement. The name of the game, Marx found, consisted of putting the data into formats that easily and immediately reveal where attention is needed. Some of the procedures that Marx and Oak Park developed are fairly sophisticated and creative. But the basic elements of their system are easy to follow—and are replicable.

## Mind the Store, Part I: "Fly the Damned Plane"

Oak Park has made a difference for kids by managing and mining student achievement data. If my perception is even roughly accurate, it is attributable to something few school systems now do. Oak Park designates the responsibility for simple, targeted, data management to the right people at the central office. Instructionally speaking, someone, in Marx's words, has to "mind the store." Marx does this capably.

There is a desperate need to recast—to realign—the role of the typical director or assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. Most live fragmented professional lives, overwhelmed by multiple duties and bureaucratic tasks, by time-consuming participation in what are often unproven comprehensive reforms or innovations which, it must be said, *have nothing to do with instructional improvement.*

Let's be honest here: Few central office staff members are emphatically charged to gather, disseminate, and coordinate the close, conscientious review of even annual (much less periodic) achievement data, followed by goal-setting, at every school site, *by every member of the instructional staff.* Fewer still monitor and ensure that these measurable goals are the basis for focused dialogue about instructional improvement. Many of the most dedicated and hard-working among them do not know if or to what extent all school staff even know their measurable goals and are making a concerted effort to reach those goals. This reminds me of Rick DuFour's comment that this is akin to a pilot's being involved in all kinds of activities or discussions—except those that have anything to do with "how to fly the damned plane."

If people in crucial positions in schools did all these things—immediately—the effect on student learning would be seismic. Someone at the central office has to spend time every week monitoring and focusing on collaborative, data-driven instructional improvement. Even a few hours a month makes a tremendous difference. Supporting this person and this mission should be "job one" for district office leadership and school boards.

In addition, preparation and induction programs for these positions need to be rebuilt from the ground up. Administrative courses and leadership academies need to include an emphasis and a set of simple procedures to ensure effective management of data for improvement. Any of the systems described in this book can show how to do this successfully.

All administrators should learn these things But every district needs one person who is given

these duties as their primary charge. In Oak Park, that person is Gary Marx.

## Mind the Store, Part II: Subject Area Specialists

Gary doesn't do this work alone. Like the other districts treated here, Oak Park and Gary Marx benefited from the work of specialists in the various tested subject areas of the MEAP. They have specialists in reading and science. Another specialist straddles social studies and math. These individuals continue to teach, but are given two hours of release time per day. For this service, they receive an additional stipend. Oak Park reallocated funds to hire these specialists when their efforts first started.

Such positions are more important than ever, for several reasons:

- We know that most teachers work in systems that promote "curricular chaos" (Schmoker & Marzano, 1999), which reflects the unlimited and overwhelming array of instructional options that greet them (pp. 130–131). They lack ongoing guidance and reinforcement concerning which standards and skills deserve priority. Subject area specialists help promote common focus and coherence and thus reduce curricular haphazardness.

- Many teachers in public schools do not have subject-area expertise in the area in which they are teaching. This proves to be a huge determinant of which kids succeed, especially in disadvantaged schools, where it accounts for as much as half the achievement gap (Darling-Hammond, 1997a, b; Haycock, 1998).

- It is time to provide additional opportunities to teachers who have demonstrated their effectiveness in the classroom and to let them earn their way into leadership positions. Their expertise and credibility should be considered essential components in the improvement scheme.

Oak Park's specialists ensure that there is *alignment:* an explicit match between the taught and the tested curriculum. They "mind the store." According to Marx, "It was crazy for us to ever believe we could increase MEAP scores or learning in those areas when we didn't have anyone *who was responsible for that and that alone*" (Richardson, 1997, p. 2) (emphasis added).

Accomplishment and responsibility are linked. In a statement attributed to Stephen Covey, "Accountability follows responsibility." A system without accountability becomes a burden to everyone as people "start blaming circumstances or others for their poor performance." Instructionally, someone must mind the store.

But even this can go awry. I've seen systems that do a great injustice to these district-level experts or teacher leaders. I've seen armies of "Teachers on Assignment" who could be doing great things, but are instead forced to do busywork that has little or no connection to results. To guide and target their efforts, we must place a simple but relentless emphasis on achievement data and results. These must be visited and revisited as we set both short- and long-term goals. In the remainder of this chapter, let's look at how Oak Park has focused on data and how the district has made progress in the area of productive teamwork.

## Managing Information the Oak Park Way

> What makes profiles useful is their simplicity, flexibility and non-technical nature. . . . The only technology you need is a pencil and paper and a calculator for percentages.
>
> —GARY MARX

Data management does not have to be complicated. In its most profound form, it tells us the

difference between where we are and where we want to be. I just received word that a school I am familiar with abandoned yet another high-sounding, but virtually untested "comprehensive school reform." No data existed to argue for its effectiveness beforehand or to show that it helped schools close the gap between where they were and where they wanted to go. With great hope, but in the virtual absence of data, the school invested thousands of dollars and enormous amounts of professional hours into a superficially attractive reform. The promise that it would "increase achievement" did not come to fruition.

Focus and simplicity are not "sexy." Perhaps this explains our historic infatuation with highly touted fads instead of simple ideas, like John Porter's admonition never to begin a school year without a review of the previous year's results. Please note the straightforward—yet ingenious—procedures Oak Park developed for its annual data analysis.

## Taking Stock: The Beginning of Wisdom in Improvement Literacy

Before setting a limited number of goals that reflect our highest priorities, we must orient ourselves on our improvement journey. First, we must decide which data are most important. Then we need to gather and review the data.

"Taking stock" is the first step in a process used in the two Arizona districts where I worked. (See Appendix A.) Educators who care about their students' achievements need to be like doctors who care about their patients' health. Doctors carefully select certain essential health indicators. Then they gather data relative to those indicators. *Only then* do they diagnose and prescribe. Educators must select the indicators that give definition to what we value. Once determined, these indicators help us to know where to aim our limited amount of time and resources.

The District Status Profile reveals a world of vital information with ease and economy—on one page. The chart richly reflects the intelligence and imagination of its Oak Park creators. Any district could adapt it (see Figure 3.2).

They begin with their own most obvious academic indicators, which in too many schools is still scant: in this case, the MEAP; the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT); ACT and SAT scores; and graduation rates. This is very accessible stuff. But we also get a look at the complementary, though potentially dissonant data: Notice how the grade point average (GPA) is situated strategically right below the achievement figures. The arrangement is not accidental. It sends a ringing message about expectations and the importance of accurate performance feedback—a feature we'll see in some of the other data forms we'll be looking at.

Then it gets a little more creative—for example, lines 15a, b, and c: "Staff attendance" data—with a twist. We get figures for everyone, from students to teachers and administrators. This has value for Oak Park—and is a demonstration of fairness and good modeling. There is a balanced budget line; a line for "College Testing Participation," and a numerical rating—not just a hunch—for whether buildings are clean and in good condition, free of drug abuse. There is a line for "Ethnic Diversity Represented" in the professional ranks.

This is great stuff. Each line item sends a message, the general one being: Measure what you value; know where you are. If we care enough about something, we will regularly diagnose, report, and review. If improvement in any sphere is truly important to us, then we will find a way to know if we are gaining or losing ground.

I love lines 6 and 7: "Marketable Skill" for students who have completed vocational or work-related coursework and "Advanced Training/Employment" for students qualified to enter college of other post-high school institutions.

FIGURE 3.2 DISTRICT STATUS PROFILE

***OAK PARK SCHOOL DISTRICT*** ***District Status Profile*** ***1994-95 to 1999-2000***

| OBJECTIVES | Baseline Data 1993-94 | | Results 1994-95 | | Results 1995-96 | | Results 1996-97 | | 6 Year Targets 1999-2000 | | Status Profile Standards | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Attainment | Status | Actual | Status | Actual | Status | Actual | Status | Target | Status | High Need (1 Point) | Moderate Need (2 Points) | Satisfactory (3 Points) | Excellent (4 Points) |
| 1. Readiness For First Grade | 62.8% | Hi | 78.9 | Sat | 84.6 | Sat | 82.3 | Sat | 90 | Exc | 0-64 | 65-74 | 75-89 | 90+ |
| 2a. MEAP Reading | 18.7% | Hi | 28.5 | Hi | 38.2 | Hi | 50.5 | Mod | 75 | Exc | 0-49 | 50-64 | 65-74 | 75+ |
| b. MEAP Mathematics | 14.8% | Hi | 42.9 | Hi | 52.8 | Mod | 66.1 | Sat | 75 | Exc | 0-49 | 50-64 | 65-74 | 75+ |
| c. MEAP Science | 41.8% | Hi | 70.2 | Sat | 15* | Hi | 28.1 | Hi | 75 | Exc | 0-49 | 50-64 | 65-74 | 75+ |
| d. MEAP Writing | NA | NA | NA | NA | 58.8* | Mod | 70.5 | Sat | 75 | Exc | 0-49 | 50-64 | 65-74 | 75+ |
| 3. Grade Point Average | 56.9% | Hi | 42.5 | Hi | 44.8 | Hi | 45.9 | Hi | 80 | Sat | 0-62 | 63-74 | 75-84 | 85+ |
| 4. Stay In School and Graduate | 77.1% | Mod | 93.8 | Exc | 94.6 | Exc | 92.7 | Exc | 90 | Exc | 0-69 | 70-79 | 80-89 | 90+ |
| 5. Student Daily Attendance | 87.3% | Mod | 89.5 | Mod | 84.1 | Hi | 89.7 | Mod | 94 | Sat | 0-84 | 85-89 | 90-94 | 95+ |
| 6. Marketable Skill | 79% | Sat | 88.8 | Sat | 96.3 | Exc | 95.2 | Exc | 100 | Exc | 0-64 | 65-74 | 75-89 | 90+ |
| 7. Advanced Training/Employment | 100% | Exc | 98.5 | Exc | 91.3 | Sat | 76.6 | Hi | 95 | Exc | 0-84 | 85-89 | 90-94 | 95+ |
| 8a. College Testing Participation | 57.4% | Sat | 59.4 | Sat | 47 | Mod | 75.6 | Exc | 70 | Exc | 0-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60+ |
| b. Score on ACT | 23.1% | Hi | 19.5 | Hi | 17.5 | Hi | 14 | Hi | 85 | Exc | 0-54 | 55-69 | 70-84 | 85+ |
| c. Score on SAT | 33.3% | Hi | 31.8 | Hi | 50 | Hi | 22.2 | Hi | 85 | Exc | 0-54 | 55-69 | 70-84 | 85+ |
| 9a. MAT: Reading | NA | NA | 25 | Hi | 26.2 | Hi | 21.2 | Hi | 80 | Exc | 0-30 | 31-54 | 55-79 | 80+ |
| b. MAT: Mathematics | NA | NA | 31.3 | Mod | 31.4 | Mod | 29.9 | Hi | 80 | Exc | 0-30 | 31-54 | 55-79 | 80+ |
| c. MAT: Science | NA | NA | 31.3 | Mod | 22.4 | Hi | 17.6 | Hi | 80 | Exc | 0-30 | 31-54 | 55-79 | 80+ |
| 10. State Endorsed Diploma | 75.6% | Sat | 85.3 | Sat | 59.7 | Hi | 33.9 | Hi | 100 | Exc | 0-64 | 65-74 | 75-89 | 90+ |
| 11a. Curriculum Outcome Based | 51.9% | Hi | 68.5 | Mod | 94 | Exc | 97 | Exc | 90 | Exc | 0-64 | 65-74 | 75-89 | 90+ |
| b. Relates to Instruction | 68.9% | Mod | 85 | Sat | 99 | Exc | 96 | Exc | 90 | Exc | 0-64 | 65-74 | 75-89 | 90+ |
| c. Supported by Training | 30.9% | Hi | 56.4 | Hi | 81 | Sat | 74 | Mod | 90 | Exc | 0-64 | 65-74 | 75-89 | 90+ |
| 12. Student Code Violations | 89.5% | Hi | 87.2 | Hi | 75.3 | Hi | 83.3 | Hi | 97 | Sat | 0-89 | 90-94 | 95-97 | 98+ |
| 13. Citizenship Rating | NA | | 67.7 | Hi | 84.4 | Mod | 85.6 | Sat | 97 | Exc | 0-74 | 75-84 | 85-90 | 91+ |
| 14a. Staff Training Rewarding | 19.4% | Hi | 43.4 | Hi | 74 | Mod | 69 | Mod | 95 | Exc | 0-64 | 65-74 | 75-89 | 90+ |
| b. Training Useful in Instruction | 27.9% | Hi | 54.1 | Hi | 82 | Sat | 83 | Sat | 95 | Exc | 0-64 | 65-74 | 75-89 | 90+ |
| 15a. Staff Attendance: Instruction | 93.2% | Hi | 94.2 | Mod | 94.6 | Mod | 93.7 | Hi | 98 | Exc | 0-93 | 94-95 | 96-97 | 98+ |
| b. Staff Attendance: Support | 95.7% | Mod | 89.8 | Hi | 94.1 | Mod | 93.8 | Hi | 98 | Exc | 0-93 | 94-95 | 96-97 | 98+ |
| c. Staff Attendance: Administration | 97% | Sat | 97.9 | Sat | 97.6 | Sat | 96.3 | Sat | 98 | Exc | 0-93 | 94-95 | 96-97 | 98+ |
| 16. Parents Attend Activities | 80.5% | Mod | 77.3 | Mod | 74.4 | Mod | 70.9 | Mod | 90 | Exc | 0-69 | 70-80 | 81-89 | 90+ |
| 17. School of Choice | 61.2% | Hi | 68.1 | Mod | 76 | Sat | 85** | Sat | 80 | Sat | 0-64 | 65-74 | 75-89 | 90+ |
| 18a. Community Grades Schools | 30.4% | Hi | 32.8 | Hi | (32.8) | Hi | (32.8) | Hi | 80 | Sat | 0-64 | 65-74 | 75-89 | 90+ |
| b. Staff Grades Schools | 28.9% | Hi | 35.1 | Hi | 60 | Hi | 57 | Hi | 80 | Sat | 0-64 | 65-74 | 75-89 | 90+ |
| c. Students Grade Schools | 26.7% | Hi | 29.8 | Hi | 40 | Hi | 44 | Hi | 80 | Sat | 0-64 | 65-74 | 75-89 | 90+ |
| 19. Ethnic Diversity Represented | 73.8% | Mod | 76.3 | Sat | (76.3) | Sat | (76.3) | Sat | 95 | Exc | 0-64 | 65-74 | 75-89 | 90+ |
| 20. Balanced Budget Maintained | -5 | Hi | 0 | Sat | >0 | Exc | >0 | Exc | 0 | Sat | <-3 | -2 to -1 | 0 | >0 |
| 21. Facilities Clean/Good Condition | 83% | Sat | 83.3 | Sat | 100 | Exc | 62.5 | Hi | 90 | Exc | 0-69 | 70-80 | 81-89 | 90+ |
| 22. Buildings Free of Drug Abuse | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| a. Student Report | 40.2% | Hi | 42.3 | Hi | 62 | Hi | 68 | Mod | 98 | Exc | 0-64 | 65-74 | 75-89 | 90+ |
| b. Teacher Report | 48.9% | Hi | 48.7 | Hi | 77 | Sat | 68 | Mod | 98 | Exc | 0-64 | 65-74 | 75-89 | 90+ |
| 23. Building Safe And Disciplined | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| a. Student Report | 18.1% | Hi | 30.4 | Hi | 43.1 | Hi | 41.2 | Hi | 98 | Exc | 0-64 | 65-74 | 75-89 | 90+ |
| b. Teacher Report | 23% | Hi | 52.3 | Hi | 76.8 | Sat | 69.2 | Mod | 98 | Exc | 0-64 | 65-74 | 75-89 | 90+ |
| **Average Point Value** | | **1.59** | | **1.87** | | **2.2** | | **2.1** | | **3.78** | | | | |
| **Overall Status** | | **High Need** | | **Moderate Need** | | **Moderate Need** | | **Moderate Need** | | **Satisfactory** | | | | |

"( )" = results carried forward from a previous reporting period. "NA" = Not Applicable/Available *New Test **Secondary Parent Data Not Available

*Source:* Oak Park School District. Used by permission.





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Then compare lines 4 and 10—we can see that the increase in graduation rate at the district is commendable, but there is quite a gap between the graduation rate and those receiving a "State Endorsed Diploma"—no small thing in Michigan because it earns students an automatic $2,400 scholarship at any Michigan college or university.

We're apt to compare line 13, "Citizenship Rating" to its immediate neighbor, line 12. "Student Code Violations," as well as lines 23a and b: the student and teacher ratings on their building's safety and discipline.

Lines 18a, b, and c allow Oak Park to gauge and take pride in the fact that during this time of change, both staff and students have given the district increasingly better ratings. This is valuable stuff—a source of celebration, reinforcement, and satisfaction, allowing them to regulate and avoid overheating the engine during the change process.

For me, the prize for most original and incisive contributions go to sections 11 and 14, having to do with curriculum and staff development. Lines 11a, b, and c ask practitioners if they regard the curriculum as being "outcome-based," if it "relates to instruction," and is "supported by training." The sum of these items demands a reckoning with "curriculum." The typical "curriculum guide," as I've heard author Heidi Hayes Jacobs say, is usually only a "well-intended fiction." It is too often an exhaustive, hard-to-use document with little or no connection to actual outcomes or instruction. In Oak Park, they have changed this: Note the dramatic increases in how teachers rate the curriculum by these severe but oh-so-necessary criteria.

Items 11c and 14a and b ask practitioners to reflect on something just as crucial: Is the curriculum "supported by [staff] Training" (11c)? Would that we had asked such questions decades ago! Is it *"Useful in Instruction"* (14b, my emphasis)? These questions, so simple to ask, put outcomes—not processes—first. At a time when there is still the most jarring distance between most staff development programs and learning goals, perhaps such questions belong in every evaluator's arsenal.

These data guide practitioner effort, intelligence, and imagination at Oak Park. The column headings "Results" and "6-Year Targets" make clear that the data's purpose is to expose the district's actual, versus ideal, status in the most essential areas. Such information promotes an honest and enormously productive encounter with the facts. According to Marx, this data analysis gave Oak Park "a focus on areas of weakness" for the first time.

Such information needs capable management. Before we look at other dimensions of Oak Park's system, consider what Marx calls the "human element," which makes their system possible.

## Data Management and the Human Element

I once heard a school principal say, only half-facetiously, that being a principal is "all about feelings." It is a dangerous overstatement if taken too far, but it hints at an important aspect of the leader's reality. Susan Rosenholtz, noted for her research on the centrality of data and goals, also found that an "ego-endangering" environment impedes school success. Teachers more readily share and learn from each other in "less threatening" workplace circumstances (Rosenholtz, 1991, p. 43).

Several times in my conversations with Marx, and with no prompting, he vehemently stressed the importance that data be rightly regarded: not as a tool for punishment, but as a source of improvement and professional fulfillment.

Any one who gets close to teachers will find that the majority are exceptionally dedicated to very difficult work. This has to be taken into account when we come in asking them to change or improve. We have to know where we are entering the stream; to distinguish between a

calculated recalcitrance and something quite different: sensible resistance to what teachers suspect is yet another flimsy, unproven initiative.

Data-driven improvement is *an innovation*. As Fullan points out, teachers are initially "wary" of it (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991, p. 87). It not only sounds somewhat mechanistic to teachers at first; it also invades a culture that for all its complexities and hardships, satisfied a desire for professional privacy and autonomy. With time, of course, this privacy takes its toll not only on teaching and learning, but on teacher morale (Little, 1987, 1990; Lortie, 1975, p. 212).

We need to make the transition to data-driven improvement correctly, as districts like Oak Park have done—by respecting and inviting professional scrutiny of the data and by asking, rather than telling practitioners, wherever possible, how we should respond instructionally to the data. And we have to provide evidence—documented accounts of how data are helping more students to learn at high levels. This, not punishment or embarrassment, is the point of data analysis. It must be perceived as such, or we risk losing the energy, imagination, and idealism that fuel improvement.

This is a deeply felt conviction in Oak Park. Marx speaks passionately and frankly to this issue, of the need for a "protected environment" and how

> you'll never be able to use this system if you use the data to threaten people. People will lie to you. We're still phobic in this area. I try to emphasize that the data doesn't mean a damn thing until you have dialogue. . . . An outsider can't judge. They don't own the data. . . . As soon as it smacks of being punitive, you're dead in the water. The superintendent, Alex Bailey, is very aware of that, and he makes statements about it. . . . He carries this human element message wherever he goes.

As Superintendent Bailey says, "The important thing is not to use data as an evaluation tool or to even use evaluation and data in the same breath. You have to make that clear." When principals meet two to four times a year with teachers on a one-on-one basis, Bailey believes principals need to take a supportive approach. The meetings are "kept apart from supervision and evaluation. It's strictly a matter of 'let's look at where we are.'"

A certain anonymity is essential to this sense of safety. Whereas Oak Park emphasizes the benefits of public disclosure at the school level, Marx points out that individual classroom data are reserved for use by the teacher and the principal only. They review the data together in an environment where improvement and resource issues are the focus.

At Oak Park, there is a carefully cultivated ethos of trusting, professional judgment. As Marx notes:

> We do all we can to trust professional judgment. There is a culture of "Be honest with me. Trust me. I will help you get resources." This way, teachers will not inflate grades. They will begin to share and to refine criteria for judgment. With such public disclosure, you have to have high trust.

The use of data in their case not only requires honesty, it promotes it. In a system that compares both grades and MEAP scores, we have, says Marx, "checks and balances in the system. If you inflate grades, you have to consider the next teacher's impression." The awkward differences between grades and MEAP scores would be obvious. One of the many positive effects of the District Status Profile was in an immediate and dramatic reduction of grade inflation among students whose grades and MEAP scores simply didn't square (Marx et al., 1997, pp. 538–539). Invasive, heavy-handed measures weren't necessary. The invisible hand of data leads to higher expectations for children—and to manifestly better results.

Informed by such human elements, a district like Oak Park progresses with a confidence not found in schools where accountability is an end in itself. As in the district profile, we can now examine the "magic" of school data in a positive light.

## The School Performance Profile: Ease and Efficiency Matter

School-level administrators need good information on school performance. Their busy schedules necessitate the use of every legitimate shortcut to help them translate data into useful information. To promote improvement, ease and efficiency matter.

We have seen how data become useful information when we identify simple patterns, which become levers for change. Oak Park makes use of such a pattern in a color-coding system that helps administrators and teachers perceive useful patterns and relationships in achievement. These help practitioners to invest their limited time and effort where it will have the greatest effect.

## The Power of Patterns

Let's look at the annotated "Sample School Student Performance Summary" in Figure 3.3. I like the way they have prominently written "Transforming data into information" in the upper left box. This emphasizes its importance.

The highlighted areas of the summary denoting "moderate need" capture our attention. Gray shading denotes that one-fourth to one-half the class is less than satisfactory. The black shading (see asterisks here) tells us that more than one-half the class is less than satisfactory in academic performance. (Note: The original form used red and green shading.) Once highlighted manually by all teachers, most of this is now done on computer by the central office staff. Also, notice the thick black line between the primary and intermediate grades. Two colors are used for the two divisions—a simple binary analysis. What patterns does this reveal? What results-oriented information does this give us?

Starting on the left side, the black shading in the "< Satisfactory" column reveals that several teachers have high proportions of underachieving students. For two of them, Michelle and Matt, over 75 percent of their students are in trouble. This prompts one to inquire whether these teachers need immediate help.

On the right side of the vertical gray bar, notice that kindergarten performance (for teachers Jan and Greg) looks terrific—it is not shaded. A strong pattern of problems, shown by the highest concentration of black and gray shading in the 1st and 2nd grades in reading and math, indicates that Ben and Michelle's students are seriously underperforming in reading.

Such simple, solid information allows the improvement apparatus to go to work. The box in the lower left, an area for questions about how the principal and staff might respond to this information, is like a call to action.

Remembering that our task is primarily to "fix *the problem*, not the blame"; we might respond to this information by asking the following questions:

- Do these teachers lack subject-area expertise?
- Have they had a chance to observe their most effective colleagues?
- Have they ever been given time and occasion to design their program with a team, thus benefiting from the best practices and experience of those who are getting the best results?

How do we respond to the obvious concentration of reading and math problems in primary school? The thick, black horizontal line helps us focus correctly on an issue. Do school improvement programs line up with these problem areas?

I work with many school systems where educators routinely use such data, graphs, and analysis to examine budgets, building construction, and bus schedules—but not academics. No one is "minding the store," monitoring the progress and the problems, or ensuring that improvement programs are selected intelligently with a predictable connection to better results.

FIGURE 3.3 SAMPLE SCHOOL STUDENT PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

**Transforming data into information.**

**(Using Highlighting to disclose patterns.)**

**Sample School**
**Student Performance Summary**

| | | | | | Less Than Satisfactory | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | < Satisfactory | | | Math | | Reading | | Citizenship | | Attendance | |
| Teacher/Grade | Students | Number | Percent | | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| K Jan | 22 | 4 | 18% | | 2 | 9% | 2 | 9% | 3 | 14% | 2 | 9% |
| K Greg | 27 | 6 | 22% | | 3 | 11% | 1 | 4% | 4 | 15% | 2 | 7% |
| 1st Ben | 26 | 18 | 69% | * | 7 | 27% | 18 | 69% | * 5 | 19% | 5 | 19% |
| 1st Michelle | 22 | 19 | 86% | * | 16 | 73% | * 16 | 73% | * 7 | 32% | 6 | 27% |
| 1st Rachel | 20 | 13 | 65% | * | 6 | 30% | 5 | 25% | 3 | 15% | 8 | 40% |
| 2nd Erin | 26 | 13 | 50% | | 7 | 27% | 10 | 38% | 1 | 4% | 6 | 23% |
| 2nd Matt | 28 | 22 | 79% | * | 12 | 43% | 13 | 46% | 9 | 32% | 10 | 36% |
| 3rd Sara | 30 | 22 | 73% | * | 8 | 27% | 13 | 43% | 7 | 23% | 13 | 43% |
| 3rd Tamara | 30 | 10 | 33% | | 5 | 17% | 10 | 33% | 4 | 13% | 4 | 13% |
| 4th Christine | 30 | 12 | 40% | | 3 | 10% | 3 | 10% | 3 | 10% | 8 | 27% |
| 4th Adam | 30 | 20 | 67% | * | 9 | 30% | 8 | 27% | 1 | 3% | 14 | 47% |
| 5th Katie | 27 | 15 | 56% | | 1 | 4% | 4 | 15% | 4 | 15% | 11 | 41% |
| 5th Jennifer | 31 | 6 | 19% | | 2 | 6% | 1 | 3% | 0 | 0% | 4 | 13% |

Do these teachers need some immediate help?

**How should the principal and staff respond to this information? How do building improvement programs line up with the needs of students performing less than satisfactorily?**

The numbers in this column are the easiest to influence.

Primary grade teachers reported more students with reading and math problems.

Most teachers report satisfactory behavior but attendance is a problem in this school.

COLOR CODES

Green: ¼ - ½ the class is less than satisfactory
Red: More than ½ the class is less than satisfactory

*Source:* Oak Park School District. Used by permission. Original "red" shading is now black (with asterisks); "green" is now dark gray.



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This is the way that Oak Park improved its programs. Next, we consider one of the most powerful ways to act on such analysis. It reveals areas of both strength and weakness within the system.

## Working Backward from Successful Schools

The district and school profiles allow us to weigh one of the immediate benefits of this level of analysis. They give us the opportunity, as Marx tells us, to begin "working backward from successful schools." This process helps to identify in-district teachers and teams who are already getting exceptional results and to learn from them. Oak Park's initial data analysis led not only to productive collaboration, but also to the realization that its *teachers were the richest source of improvement.* This is especially profound. Fullan and others discovered that teachers seem to learn best in an environment where they learn from one another (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991, pp. 131–135). We need to encourage teachers to share their successes and the methods that account for them. We must acknowledge the bald fact that we have something to learn from our highest-achieving teachers.

Is it a stretch to suspect that Michelle, with 73 percent of her students scoring in the unsatisfactory level in reading, might have something to learn from Rachel, with only 25 percent of her students scoring in the unsatisfactory level? (See Figure 3.3). With a little imagination and tact, administrators and other leaders can initiate multiple arrangements for teachers to learn from each other—without embarrassing anyone or even divulging scores.

Central office personnel or subject-area specialists need to be on the lookout for successful schools, teams, and teachers outside their district and in their immediate region. This would enable teams of teachers to visit and to learn from each other. Within our own districts, it is high time we get past what Joseph Senese calls an insidious "egalitarianism"—that makes it easier for teachers to share their most successful methods on the road rather than at home (Senese, 2000/2001).

By analyzing and discussing data collectively, Oak Park tapped into expertise right on its own doorstep. It helped them to see and spread the benefits of a host of effective practices, to strategically place students in the right groups with the right teachers, and to identify teachers needing help in certain subject areas. This led (a real coup) to the hiring of subject-area specialists. The influence these experts exerted on the elementary schools enabled more kids to learn from teachers with the appropriate subject-area preparation.

Data analysis forms and procedures produced the dialogue and action that led to such staff development improvements. Another important form that provides information easily, the "Classroom Profile," contains useful data primarily for teacher use.

## The Classroom Profile

At Oak Park, clear, simple charts and graphs facilitate the management and perception of data that promote urgency and compel action. The "Sample Year-End Classroom Profile" in Figure 3.4 exhibits a similar power.

At a glance, the shaded areas alert us to the students whose grades indicate moderate to serious difficulties. We also see which subjects are included. Conversely, we get a quick visual take on the large proportion of students who *are* doing well. Within seconds, we see that the math column is largely nonshaded. Achievement in that area is comparatively high. The same lower-achieving students account for most of the low achievement in the math column. In the third column on the right, notice the black highlights on lines 18, 19, and 20, under MEAPRI. (Note: RI stands for "Reading for

## Sample Year End Classroom Profile

| Color Code | Red | = High Need |
|---|---|---|
| | Green | = Moderate Need |
| | White | = Satisfactory |

| | | | | | | Grades, Citizenship, Attendance and Code Violations | | | | | | | | | Standardized Test Results | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nmbr | Student Name | Student ID | G | S | E | Math | Sci | SocSt | LngArt | Read | GPA | Citz | % Att | SCV | MEAPM | MEAPRS | MEAPRI | Entry Date | Spec Ed |
| 1 | DAJUAN | 1239872 | 4 | M | B | C | C | B | B | B | 2.60 | 1 | 100 | 0 | 528 | 300 | 321 | 92/09/02 | No |
| 2 | NATHANAEL | 1261033 | 4 | M | A | A | B | A | A | B | 3.60 | 1 | 81 | 0 | 542 | 311 | 295 | 92/08/26 | No |
| 3 | MICHAEL | 1240636 | 4 | M | W | A | A | B | B | B | 3.40 | 1 | 98.9 | 0 | 542 | 311 | 295 | 96/08/27 | No |
| 4 | JUSTIN | 1250855 | 4 | M | B | A | A | A | A | A | 4.00 | 1 | 95.2 | 0 | 584 | 350 | 335 | 92/09/08 | No |
| 5 | BRITTANY | 1245306 | 4 | F | B | A | B | B | B | B | 3.20 | 1 | 100 | 0 | 526 | 311 | 321 | 92/09/02 | No |
| 6 | EBONY | 1249339 | 4 | F | B | A | A | B | A | A | 3.80 | 1 | 94.3 | 0 | 530 | 334 | 312 | 92/09/02 | No |
| 7 | LAWRENCE | 1238716 | 4 | M | B | A | A | A | B | A | 3.80 | 1 | 98.6 | 0 | 545 | 305 | 312 | 92/09/02 | No |
| 8 | RALFIEL | 1259004 | 4 | M | W | A | A | B | A | A | 3.80 | 1 | 96.6 | 0 | | | | 96/12/05 | No |
| 9 | NORMAN | 1257290 | 4 | M | W | B | C | C | C | C | 2.20 | 2 | 90.7 | 0 | 534 | 290 | 300 | 91/08/28 | No |
| 10 | RYAN | 1239896 | 4 | M | B | A | A | A | A | B | 3.80 | 1 | 94.6 | 0 | 510 | 320 | 312 | 92/08/26 | No |
| 11 | JOHNATHAN | 1256228 | 4 | M | B | C | C | C | C | C | 2.00 | 1 | 97.7 | 0 | | | | 94/12/01 | Yes |
| 12 | WARREN | 1257540 | 4 | M | W | B | C | B | C | B | 2.60 | 2 | 93.6 | 0 | 547 | 295 | 312 | 95/08/29 | No |
| 13 | ANTONIO | 1238732 | 4 | M | W | A | A | A | A | A | 4.00 | 1 | 99.4 | 0 | 528 | 295 | 306 | 92/09/21 | No |
| 14 | KENYA | 1229357 | 4 | F | B | A | A | A | A | B | 3.80 | 1 | 95.8 | 0 | | | | 96/08/27 | No |
| 15 | DESEAN | 1240643 | 4 | M | B | A | A | B | B | B | 3.40 | 1 | 93.6 | 0 | 545 | 311 | 335 | 94/08/30 | No |
| 16 | MONIQUE | 1238740 | 4 | F | W | A | A | A | A | B | 3.80 | 2 | 96.9 | 0 | 537 | 311 | 312 | 92/08/26 | No |
| 17 | DEANGELO | 1240644 | 4 | M | B | A | A | B | A | A | 3.80 | 1 | 87.8 | 0 | 547 | 320 | 306 | 95/08/29 | No |
| 18 | JOVAUN | 1240645 | 4 | M | B | A | B | B | B | B | 3.20 | 1 | 99.2 | 0 | 534 | 311 | 278 | 92/08/26 | No |
| 19 | CHRISTOPH | 1240649 | 4 | M | B | C | C | C | C | C | 2.00 | 1 | 98 | 0 | 510 | 300 | 278 | 94/09/01 | Yes |
| 20 | JOVAN | 1200853 | 4 | M | W | C | D | C | C | C | 1.80 | 3 | 82.7 | 0 | 483 | 274 | 271 | 95/08/29 | Yes |
| 21 | JOSEPH | 1249558 | 4 | M | B | B | A | C | B | B | 3.00 | 1 | 98.9 | 0 | 516 | 334 | 306 | 96/08/27 | No |
| 22 | MAWRESE | 1240651 | 4 | M | B | A | A | A | A | A | 4.00 | 1 | 98.9 | 0 | 542 | 350 | 335 | 92/08/26 | No |
| 23 | NINA | 1259952 | 4 | F | B | A | B | B | B | B | 3.20 | 1 | 100 | 0 | 542 | 320 | 282 | 94/09/21 | No |
| 24 | KATYA | 1240660 | 4 | F | B | A | B | B | B | B | 3.20 | 1 | 100 | 0 | 545 | 305 | 306 | 93/08/31 | No |
| 25 | RONDA | 1240661 | 4 | F | W | B | C | C | C | C | 2.20 | 3 | 92.4 | 0 | | | | 96/08/27 | No |
| 26 | ASHLEY | 1240662 | 4 | F | B | A | A | B | A | A | 3.80 | 2 | 88.1 | 0 | 584 | 311 | 321 | 93/08/31 | No |
| 27 | RONNIE | 1240663 | 4 | M | W | A | B | B | B | B | 3.20 | 1 | 100 | 0 | 516 | 295 | 335 | 92/08/26 | No |
| 28 | BRIAN | 1240664 | 4 | M | B | A | B | C | C | C | 2.60 | 1 | 89 | 0 | 537 | 300 | 306 | 92/09/03 | No |
| 29 | MELISSA | 1240665 | 4 | F | A | A | A | A | A | A | 4.00 | 1 | 94.6 | 0 | 558 | 311 | 335 | 92/08/26 | No |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Teacher: | Joseph | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

*Source*: Oak Park School District. Used by permission. Original "red" shading is now black; "green" is now dark grey.









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Information" for nonfiction works. RS indicates "Reading Story" for fiction). Invaluable to anyone needing fast, efficient information, this profile also answers the two vital questions for improvement in any sphere: How well are we doing? Where are our greatest areas of need?

These graphs provide the information needed for improvement in the classroom, the school, and the district. The more vivid and accessible we make these patterns and relationships, the better the chances that we can

- Thwart misperception and denial.
- Promote efficiently focused effort, perception, and precision.
- Reinforce healthy accountability.

## Checks and Balances at the Classroom Level

The classroom profile shows crucial discrepancies between grades and MEAP performance. The importance of this is noted in a recent study of middle schools. It focused on 23,000 students whose actual test-score performance *varied enormously,* but whose average GPA scores were *almost identical:* 2.66 for the highest-achieving students compared with 2.52 for the lowest-achieving group. Earlier, we saw how this information, when shared with teachers, led to both higher expectations and higher performance within a school year.

On Line 13, notice that Antonio achieved a 4.00 GPA—but a lower MEAPRS score than students who have much lower GPA scores. Similarly, on Line 18, Jovaun's GPA reflects no concern, but his MEAPRI score is in the "high need" category.

It is not necessary to jump to conclusions about these differences. But for those who "own the data," to use Marx's term, an encounter with these discrepancies is fundamental. Facilitated by the use of this table and of simple color-coding, an EXCEL spreadsheet is all that is needed. Such reports provide the checks and balances that Marx refers to. They provide a safe review that forges an honest, vital link between reality and perception.

Notice that without the guides, the color-coding, and the explanation key, we remove the thresholds that determine "excellent," "satisfactory," "moderate need," and "high need." Without standards, the form is merely a conventional report; it is not yet useful information. This is the stuff of focused, productive action. And it is not all that complicated.

## Simpler Yet: Teacher Perceptions

Marx enjoys having people do the highlighting work for the "Classroom Profile" in workshops. The low-tech, manual process uses one color of felt markers to designate grades or scores below a certain point, and another color for scores below the next threshold, and so on. This process could be conducted by anyone, anywhere. Doing these processes manually, however, makes an unforgettable impression.

Much like the "nontechnical nature" that Marx touts, the "Sample Response" form (Figure 3.5) contains one of the simplest, but most profound pieces in Oak Park's improvement scheme. To complete this form, teachers are asked: "Which student is OK and which student is not OK? Submit this information and figure out the percentages by the end of the marking period."

This "Sample Response" form is effective for several reasons. It sends the right message by asking for teacher's professional judgment. In fact, Oak Park's goal is to make teacher perception the number one predictor of year-end results (Marx et al., 1997, p. 540). In the Oak Park system, teacher perception is informed by the checks and balances that we described. As Bob Marzano and John Kendall (1996, pp. 231–241) found, teacher judgment about student proficiency is quite reliable when it's based on commonly defined standards that are aligned with assessments and report card

FIGURE 3.5 SAMPLE RESPONSE

*Instructions for teachers:* Which student is OK and which student is not OK? Submit this information and figure out the percentages by the end of the marking period (X = not OK).

Highlighted Students have at least one "X"

| | Student Name | Grade | Math | Read | Citz | Atnd |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | KENDRA | 1 | X | X | | |
| 2 | DEBORAH | 1 | | X | | |
| 3 | RANIA | 1 | | X | | |
| 4 | LEMAR | 1 | | X | | X |
| 5 | SHONTOYA | 1 | | | | |
| 6 | BIANCA | 1 | | X | X | |
| 7 | BRITTANY | 1 | X | X | | |
| 8 | JOHN | 1 | | X | | X |
| 9 | LATRISHA | 1 | | | | |
| 10 | MIAKLL | 1 | | X | | |
| 11 | MARILYN | 1 | X | X | X | |
| 12 | DAYVON | 1 | X | X | X | X |
| 13 | DENZEL | 1 | X | X | | |
| 14 | JAZMIN | 1 | | X | | |
| 15 | MARY | 1 | | | | |
| 16 | MICHAEL | 1 | | | | |
| 17 | DONOVAN | 1 | | | | |
| 18 | GHRASS | 1 | | X | | |
| 19 | WAYNE | 1 | | X | | X |
| 20 | JUSTINE | 1 | | | | |
| 21 | JASON | 1 | | | | |
| 22 | MATTHEW | 1 | | X | | X |
| 23 | BRYCE | 1 | X | X | X | |
| 24 | BRANDON | 1 | | X | | |
| 25 | MATTHEW | 1 | X | X | X | |
| 26 | NICHOLAS | 1 | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | 18 | | 7 | 18 | 5 | 5 |
| | | | | | | |
| | Teacher | Ben | | | | |

Total number of students with at least one "X"

Total number of students with an "X" in each column.

*Source:* Oak Park School District. Used by permission.

grades. Such midcourse reviews of student progress give the teacher a fairly accurate picture of the individual kids and the percentage of kids making adequate progress toward year-end achievement levels.

It also shows the teacher where to concentrate efforts. When 18 students rate "not OK" in reading, the teacher and principal can consider the need for assistance or resources. Such a procedure involves taking stock at the classroom level—*during* the year when there is still time to intervene. Instituted in every school and district without delay, this procedure can provide an opportunity for assistance, a sense of urgency, and a measurement of progress. It alerts us to the need for interdependence and for collaborative solutions that close the gap between current performance and year-end goals.

## Collaboration: Periodic Teacher and Principal Interviews

Currently at Oak Park, the "Sample Response" needs to be submitted to the district office only once a year, in October, but student grades must be turned in each quarter. Marx told me that this information is processed, color-coded, and returned to schools in the form of a building percentage within three days. They show the number of "successful and not successful in each subject—all on one 8 ½" x 11" page." Marx and the subject-area specialists "mind the store" by looking at each school's results to measure the progress toward their year-end goals:

> If you do that four times a year, you know where you're at. We don't want "adjusted" grades. If you don't flag them, I'm going to think they're OK. I need to know who needs help to allocate resources.

Principals and teachers review the results together. These conversations introduce a healthy element of accountability and allow principals to exercise effective instructional leadership without causing undue anxiety among teachers. When asked how instructional staff regards these sessions, Marx explains:

> We've never had a single grievance about these sessions from the union. We'd be hearing about it through those channels. You can't use data as a club.

According to Marx, when teachers use the reports as a basis for teacher-to-teacher collaboration, they "get caught up in talking about the 'kids in the red and green.' It's so much a part of the daily process, part of the language." These quarterly reports provide the short-term results orientation that business and psychology tell us is essential to progress in any endeavor (Schmoker, 1999, Chapter 4).

Marx also points out that this quarterly data gets used in various ways. "Some principals meet with teachers more often than others. Some teams meet more consistently during the year." This data-driven dialogue among teachers and between teacher and principal has paid off richly. A greater consistency in this area is now a priority for the district.

## The Cost of Data-Driven Improvement

Marx describes the Information Management system that has been developed at Oak Park as a labor-intensive process:

> The work of creating the "District Status Profile" requires about three days of work by three clerical people. About the same amount of time is invested in the quarterly report. The people who collect the data, create the graphs, and run the color copier work for an outside contractor. . . . Teachers are given release time to analyze and discuss the data on days designated as "Records Days" for half a day. This occurs twice a year.

If this seems extravagant, consider that even a fairly small district like Oak Park found a way to allocate resources for these purposes. It is much less expensive than having a full-time information management specialist on the payroll.

In the remaining sections, think of Oak Park's investment. The time and effort allocated led to vital and invaluable school improvements.

## From Data Analysts to Productive Team Members: The CSIP

Data analysis has been the catalyst for focused collective dialogue and improvement planning. Marx affirms that "once you teach them to analyze the data, then they can become productive team members and help you search for solutions" (Richardson, 1997, p. 2). For Marx, teamwork is the key to Oak Park's past success and future improvement. The process began with something they dubbed the Collaborative School Improvement Process (CSIP). Collective data analysis and dialogue made the need for change vivid. Those involved realized: "If we keep doing what we've always done, then we'll always get what we've always gotten."

CSIP interrupted business as usual. The school staff and the community came together to identify indicators of success and examine data relative to those indicators. This is the first step in a school's crucial process of annual improvement planning. This work revealed the district's strengths and, by its own reckoning, its many weaknesses. Such a focus on areas of weakness developed into something new and powerful at Oak Park.

Collaboration and data analysis brought into bold relief the need to capture and disseminate teacher expertise. So the newly assigned instructional specialists, with the help of many teachers, completed an important document for the elementary grades, the *Instructional Guide*. It contains grade-level lists of student objectives in language arts, math, and science assessed on the MEAP; effective teaching strategies linked to each of the objectives; and a list of effective resources and materials linked explicitly to those objectives. The *Instructional Guide* immediately effected changes in practice and results that virtually guarantee improvement for every school.

With Title I Funds and a grant from the C. S. Mott Foundation, Oak Park provided stipends for a large portion of the district's teachers who attended their first Summer Academy. Oak Park knew that many teachers' summer plans precluded perfect attendance. So, they encouraged staff to attend any or all of the clinics. For the first time, teachers in great numbers engaged in the in-house activities, which aligned with results. At the Summer Academy, teachers

- Collaboratively reviewed and analyzed data, including the identified MEAP outcomes.
- Learned strategies from each other that were linked to these outcomes.
- Demonstrated lessons, from the new *Instructional Guide*, by the most effective teachers.
- Worked in teams to adapt and refine lessons to maximize their effectiveness.
- Ditched generic training sessions like those they had done in the past, to provide professional development that was *linked directly to assessed student knowledge and abilities identified* in the Instructional Guide.

These activities fulfill John Porter's desire to rid urban school systems of the "loose connectedness" that dooms them to low achievement, even when effort and commitment run high (Marx et al., 1997, p. 530).

According to one of Oak Park's internal documents, "The final evaluation of the instructional clinic is still pending." Using the results of the data to judge success instead of teacher satisfaction—the sad, but de facto criteria of most staff development elsewhere—represents a significant change in mindset. Significant, too, was the symbolic power in the fact that the superintendent, central office staff, and building principals also participated in the clinics, along with the teachers.

## The Experts Are Among Us

These clinics created an immediate awareness and respect for what we alluded to earlier as internal expertise—our best and most accessible source for staff development. Marx is convinced that Oak Park's progress resulted from "working backward from successful schools"—and teachers—within their own district. He saw how this data-based dialogue led teachers to see that "there was differentiation between high and low scoring schools *accounted for by differences in strategies*. . . . One school had 100 percent of its kids succeeding in science" (emphasis added).

In both structural and strategic ways, teachers began to develop craft knowledge. Marx stated:

> Teachers were sharing new strategies, hearing for the first time about specific strategies like daily oral language. . . . They began to say, "Use this program, these books to improve these skills." This created a new openness to sharing strategies, and there was an affirmation and exchange about how to address proficiencies in certain MEAP areas.

It also led to a greater interest in collaborating during the school year.

The Mott funding enabled about 25 percent of the school personnel to begin meeting monthly or quarterly to share and refine teaching strategies at both the district and the school levels.

## Research and Development

Mott also funded a different kind of summer school built around action research. Elementary teachers began to teach low-achieving children with the use of such new teaching strategies. Teachers convened daily to discuss implementation problems and refinements. They disseminated the lessons they had learned to other teachers in the district.

Breakthrough teaching strategies do not have to be wholly original or have a brand name. They do not require years of clinical or experimental validation. On the contrary, advances in craft knowledge are often teacher-invented adjustments that make a world of difference. Over the years, teachers learned an array of specific, successful strategies from colleagues, including the following:

- First graders write the beginning of their stories on the first day, the middle of their stories on the second day, and the end of their stories on the third day. Each section is written on three separate pages. This process, according to one teacher, makes early story-writing "not so overwhelming" and "gives the student an opportunity to read and reread for fluency." I have seen a variation of this strategy work wonders for a 1st grade team in Arizona.
- Students sing vowel sounds contained in a short song, using flash cards to visually reinforce the vowels.
- Teachers learn to maximize the effects of their "Word Walls" by customizing them around themes and concepts currently being learned by the students.
- Teachers learned writing tips to motivate reluctant writers by writing "Community Stories" as a team.
- Teachers labeled and color-coded books at reading stations to ensure that students read books within their range of comfort, interest, and ability.
- Teachers learned to help students create a relief map of Michigan using sand, glue, and food dye to meet a social studies objective.
- Teachers learned when and how to extend a lesson that was going well and how to adjust the speed of a lesson when students experienced trouble.
- Teachers acquired a number of ways to manipulate math examples more effectively to teach certain specific skills.
- Teachers learned a class management tool. In it, the teacher asks students to "gimme five" with each finger representing the heart, mind, ears,

undivided attention, and eyes. "When you teach this at the beginning of the school year," shared one teacher, "it becomes very effective. Once they know all five categories, it's a quick way to get them focused!" Note: This is precisely the sort of sensible, consistent classroom routines that Harry Wong (1998) found crucial to a productive classroom in his wonderful and practical book, *The First Days of School*.

• Parents and teachers came together to develop easy to read lists aligned with grade-level and subject-area outcomes, which parents could then check off during the year as students learned them.

All the adjustments that Oak Park made began with *dialogue based on data*. Marx believes that these new actions established a greater consistency and focus on the MEAP objectives and on the most effective strategies for helping kids master them. One particular strategy stands out for having had a pervasive affect on the achievement in Oak Park. It is a widely known and underused reading strategy known as "Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review" (SQ3R).

## Leadership and a Buck Well Invested

SQ3R is a versatile method used in any subject area for any reading assignment. It all but guarantees higher levels of retention and understanding. Oak Park's emphasis on this particular strategy is worth noting. In *Leadership and the New Science*, Margaret Wheatley (1994) discusses the importance of "broadcasting" the organization's message through the leader's visible and explicit actions. This is done to ensure clarity and coherence. Certain carefully chosen symbolic actions similarly express the heart of the organization's message.

Knowing that the widespread use of the SQ3R method could have a pervasive effect on achievement, district administrators began to roam the halls asking students to define SQ3R. If successful, the student received a small reward, such as a cookie for an elementary student and a dollar bill for secondary students. This broadcast the message loud and clear to everyone in the organization.

Such gestures are the stuff of leadership. These actions might seem cute or frivolous until we realize what most of us would do if we knew the superintendent walked through our school. In this case a cookie is not just a cookie; it's a symbol that says: "Let's not be casual about effective practices. Let's be obsessive about *actually implementing* what works."

Leadership is as leadership does. Improvement in Oak Park began when formal occasions enabled faculties to analyze data together, in a positive—not punitive—setting. This action emphasized teachers' concern with objectivity, fairness, and faith. In the open air of collective analysis, the use of data moves both minds and wills toward energized action. The increasingly higher rating the district received from teachers affirms that faith.

Perhaps this humane mix of data, teamwork, and continuous improvement explains another unanticipated benefit—a larger pool of qualified teachers. Marx observed: "A learning community draws folks into an urban area."

## Jump-Starting Successful Action and Planning

Oak Park learned two important lessons about data-driven, reflective action planning. In the early stages, they experienced more success working with small cadres of interested people. They also discovered that "people will be reluctant to participate if they perceive the activities to be ego endangering. Oak Park took steps to ensure that teachers' first contacts with data were nonjudgmental and supportive" (Marx et al., 1997, pp. 542–543).

I once sat in a high school principal's cramped office trying, without much success, to referee a somewhat heated exchange between the principal and a department chair about how the school was to use and report his department's data. The chair of the department agreed that teachers needed to make the leap to common end-of-course assessments; however, he required *guaranteed* protections and anonymity before submitting data. The session ended positively—after the principal put these guarantees in writing. Now, years later, the school routinely uses departmental data as a primary source of feedback for ongoing and annual improvement efforts schoolwide.

## Getting Even Better: An Area of Opportunity

> What gets measured doesn't necessarily get done. What gets measured *and discussed on a regular basis has a better chance of getting done* (emphasis added).
>
> —FROM OAK PARK'S TRAINING MATERIALS

And yet, for all their gains and the governor's accolades, collaboration—teamwork—continues to be both a triumph and a challenge for Oak Park. Marx is convinced that it may still be the area where they have the most to gain. The structures and practices that grew out of the summer sessions, combined with the selective participation in ongoing and quarterly dialogue, made a tremendous difference—and generated the intellectual capital they continue to benefit from. But as the district's achievement has reached a plateau, they find themselves realizing that if they are to go further, greater proportions of the faculty need to be participating in ongoing, regular dialogue *throughout the year* to capture the intelligence and sustain the energy needed to reach new heights. For Marx, this dialogue is the next frontier and the greatest opportunity for further improvement over the substantial gains they have made in the past five years.

As Marx states, regular, scheduled collaboration is

> currently inconsistent in schools. We've come to realize that there are still a number of teachers not moving to the level we want, that we need to be more sophisticated about the content in the classroom. We need to get an even better handle on how to reach the red and green [below and borderline proficiency] kids. To get this going, we're working with a master's cohort in connection with Western Michigan University. It's free to teachers, and we're able to do a lot of real collaboration in the course, which now involves almost half of our teachers.

Superintendent Alexander Bailey agrees: "There is a need to collaborate more consistently." He describes how just this last year, teachers at one of their lowest-achieving schools began to meet both with each other and with staff at one of the highest-achieving schools. Scores went up:

> On the last MEAP, they went *from 25 percent* of their students passing on the MEAP Writing assessment to *77 percent* this year. The key was that the teams at this school met regularly, looked at student papers, and talked about strategies. They worked as a team religiously, to impact those test scores.
>
> As a result of this, we want to institute something we call "Family of Learners," with teams of teachers looking at data more frequently and developing strategies.

The importance of *regular collaboration focused on classroom content* deserves and demands such eternal vigilance; it is a fragile and easily eroded entity. Perhaps Marx's university course and the "Family of Learners" that Bailey is promoting will make the difference.

Districts like Oak Park are winning, but still fighting a cultural war—one that continues to pit the traditional but false comforts of professional solitude against the discipline and the increasingly compelling benefits of focused, collective dialogue. Because of the progress they have made in the

areas of teamwork, data analysis, and goal-setting, thousands of children have options and the promise of a future they might never have dreamed of. The future of thousands of other children hinges on Oak Park's continued progress.

► *For further information, contact Gary Marx at Oak Park Schools, 13900 Granzon, Oak Park, MI 48237; phone: 248-691-8477.*

# Vignettes 7 and 8

## Vignette 7

Sherry Burcham, former vice-principal and testing coordinator at Sunderland Elementary School, Calvert County Public Schools, Calvert County, Maryland, is now the district's supervisor of elementary reading and language arts.

Sherry Burcham reports:

In recent years, Sunderland Elementary has improved its Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) scores considerably. Our highest Composite Performance Index scores occurred in 1997, the year that we began to use *Results* (Schmoker, 1996) as a guide for the school's improvement planning process. In 1997 and 1999, Sunderland was the highest-achieving school in the entire southern region of the state.

In the fall of the 1996–97 school year, I chaired the instruction and assessment committee of the school improvement team for Sunderland Elementary. Representatives from each grade level, an instructional assistant, and a parent reviewed *Results* to strengthen our focus on data, teamwork, and goal setting. The information in the book helped us to solidify our mission and to clarify our efforts. It promoted a discussion of monthly grade-level team meetings with follow-up reports, review, and analysis of data, and discussions about instructional goals and practices.

Through a team approach, we developed new policies for data collection, instructional recordkeeping, and grading practices. We designed annual performance goals for each academic area. Teacher teams also began to review data from summative, formative, and unit assessments in all content areas. The student data helped to guide interventions and to determine whether or not the programs worked. When a former special education teacher from Sunderland was asked about what made Sunderland distinctive, she said it was the team approach to diagnosing and prescribing instruction that would meet student learning needs.

In the beginning, some members of the instruction and assessment committee had reservations about the expanded data collection and other recommended changes—until we attained our record-breaking 1997 MSPAP scores. At that point, the process garnered recognition and support. One veteran teacher admitted that she was not always in agreement with what was requested or suggested, but was now convinced by the results. Teachers often commented that

they were getting better information and communication than ever, and that they felt more involved in the decision-making and school improvement process. For my principal and myself, this was evidence of true teacher empowerment.

MSPAP scores are available only for Grades 3 and 5, and they are imperfect measures for individual students. They are primarily for school accountability purposes. To measure growth both annually and during the year and to set goals in the other grades, we used other assessments, like the county's own Test of Writing Skills. In reading and math, we relied on assessments in our textbook series. We administered common reading assessments several times during the year using the D.C. Heath series. Fortunately, it had a computerized scoring and reporting system, which gave teachers regular feedback on student mastery of reading skills several times during the year. We would discuss the areas of strength and weakness revealed by these tests at our monthly meetings. For science and social studies, we used conventional letter-grade data and performance levels on classroom assessments. With data on such assessments as our baseline, we set conservative goals—and exceeded them.

We believed that these were valid assessments that could help us to create short-term targets and annual goals that would reinforce our efforts on the MSPAP. Our assumptions were confirmed by our strong improvements on the MSPAP.

This was a powerful process for helping kids get where they need to be. It all goes back to empowering the teacher and the community. To reach high expectations—and to ensure buy-in to the process—people need to be informed and involved. Teams need to be given the right data and information so that they can set realistic goals and know when they have achieved those goals. Then we can celebrate!

> ➤ *For further information, contact Sherry Burcham, Supervisor of Elementary Reading and Language Arts, Calvert County Public Schools, 1305 Dares Beach Rd., Prince Frederick, MD 20678; phone: 410-535-7253.*

# Vignette 8

Ken Parker is associate superintendent of curriculum and instruction in the Orcutt Union School District, Orcutt, California. This is a K–8 district with six elementary schools and two junior high schools. Forty percent of the students receive free and reduced-cost lunch. Joe Dana is principal at Orcutt's Joe Nightingale Elementary School, where the student minority population is more than 40 percent. Twenty-five percent of the students are enrolled in English as a second language.

Between 1997 and 1999, their national percentile scores on the Stanford 9 increased at all levels districtwide, with especially significant average increases in Grade 2 and Grade 3. They experienced a growth of 12 points in reading, 14 points in language, and 20 points in math—districtwide.

Joe Nightingale Elementary School ranked among the most successful elementary schools. Between 1997 and 1999, every grade level saw appreciable increases in almost every area tested on the Stanford 9. The following table shows their 2nd and 3rd grade gains.

**Stanford 9 National Percentile Scores**

| *Grade 2* | *1997* | *1999* | *Gain* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reading | 46% | 56% | +10 |
| Math | 48% | 72% | +24 |
| Language | 43% | 58% | +15 |
| Spelling | 56% | 67% | +11 |
| *Grade 3* | *1997* | *1999* | *Gain* |
| Reading | 43% | 60% | +17 |
| Math | 42% | 78% | +36 |
| Language | 45% | 66% | +21 |
| Spelling | 42% | 70% | +28 |

Ken Parker and Joe Dana report:

We began to use the book *Results* (Schmoker, 1996) to establish our improvement strategies. Participants learned data-analysis strategies that grade-level teams used by developing answers to the following questions:

• What specific results do we want our students to achieve, based upon our analysis of all assessment results?

• What evidence will we accept that students achieved these results?

• Which students achieve these results and which do not?

• How will we change instruction to maximize every student's opportunity to achieve our desired academic results?

Considering results first, rather than curriculum, is a difficult shift to make. It is, however, the only way to focus instruction on what students need most. Grade-level teams intentionally plan for student achievement of the most essential standards at each grade level.

We use data constantly. At the beginning of the school year, teachers analyze Stanford 9 data and classroom evidence scores from the prior year. Then, grade-level teams in every school select goals and targets based on the analysis of this data. We select two exemplars of student work for each target—one for "at" standard performance and the other for "above" standard performance. Students, parents, and teachers all share and discuss student and school progress toward established targets. We monitor student progress against the targets three times during the school year. Teachers instantly felt comfortable when this results-based planning process resulted in progress.

Nightingale selects a lead teacher at each grade level. Characterized as a "bottom-line" person, the lead teacher receives no additional pay for this work. But the other teachers feel accountable to the lead teacher. It helps to have someone other than the principal say: "We have to get this done." It gives structure to research-based planning.

As teachers saw progress, they felt successful. This kindled enthusiasm and an even greater willingness to have even more discussions.

Teamwork made the difference. Time for team meetings was achieved by trading some weekly faculty meetings for grade-level team meetings. Grade-level teams regularly modify instruction to maximize student achievement of targets.

The results have been astounding—and they are not accidental. *More than anything we have done, this has created focus in our instructional planning and delivery efforts.* Planning for results has made all the difference.

➤ *For more information, contact Ken Parker, Associate Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, Orcutt Union School District, 501 Dyer St., Orcutt, CA 93457; phone: 805-937-5699. Or contact Joe Dana, Principal, Joe Nightingale Elementary School, 255 Winter Rd., Santa Maria, CA 93455; phone: 805-937-2511.*

# 4 Glendale Union High School District: A Comprehensive, Data-Driven, Performance-Based Assessment System

> The bottom line is being results driven.
> —Jim Kieffer, superintendent, Glendale Union High School District

> I remember the days when we would sit under a tree and relate to nature. Now we have focus, goals, and direction.
> —Linda O'Connor, principal, Cortez High School

> In real life, you need to learn real-life applications. I want to be an architect when I grow up. My teacher gave me an opportunity to see what it's like to measure out a real building. . . . We all take the same tests, which I think is a real good idea.
> —Marian Bebec, a student at Cortez High School

Glendale Union High School District, in Glendale, Arizona, is located just west of Phoenix. It consists of nine high schools and two alternative schools, with a student population of about 14,000. Like many suburban areas, it has seen an increase in the proportion of students who live in poverty, and an increase in the number of second-language learners in the district. Once a more affluent area, it now has a free and reduced-price lunch population of more than 40 percent. In the past few years, its limited English proficient (LEP) population has increased from about 2 percent to about 11 percent.

Glendale Union maintains as *impressive, mature, and results-oriented a performance-based assessment system* as you'll find. This is especially significant because such comprehensive, data-driven, performance-based assessment systems are almost impossible to find. Grant Wiggins, the assessment expert whose work in this area is so extensive, has confirmed this for me.

The system began under the visionary leadership and guidance of Gerry George, superintendent between 1982 and 1995. George sought the help and advice of Larry Lezotte and Grant Wiggins, who also played a significant role in helping to give conceptual shape to this exceptional district.

But the real credit goes to the district's teachers, whose creativity and intelligence are manifest in the wealth of lessons, assessments, and instructional materials they have produced and refined over several years. We will be looking at

several examples of this work, at their data management system and their highly effective shared leadership structures.

## A History of Results

I have visited Glendale Union several times over the years. On one occasion, I attended a presentation given by superintendent Jim Kieffer. He began by having us read a short article by Harvard's Richard Elmore (1995). The gist of the article is that "reform" and "restructuring" processes, for all the time and energy they consume, seldom affect student achievement.

When it comes to being results- versus process-oriented, to satisfying the requirements of both conventional and performance-based assessment, the Glendale Union High School District has a distinguished pedigree. When I visited there in the late 1980s, they were among the first districts I came across who seemed to realize that "outcome-based education" (OBE) *was about achieving better outcomes*—not just defining them. It was clear to Glendale that OBE required something different and difficult from us. And they were emphatically "standards-based" well before "standards" became an educational byword.

Let's look at Glendale Union's results. We begin with their performance on the Test of Academic Proficiency (TAP), a norm-referenced test. Between 1992 and 1995, and with approximately 40 percent of their students on free and reduced-price lunch, their reading scores were about 10 points higher than the state's average each year, and about 13 points higher than the national average (see Figure 4.1). In mathematics, they typically scored about 11 points higher than the state and about 9 points higher than the national percentile (Figure 4.2).

The district has since done quite respectably on the more recently administered Stanford 9, averaging several points higher every year than the state at every grade level (Figure 4.3). Even more recently, they were proud to be featured on the cover of the Phoenix newspaper, the *Arizona Republic*, for being among the highest-achieving *and* most-improved school districts in the metropolitan Phoenix area on Arizona's fledgling and highly demanding new test, Arizona's Instrument for Measuring Standards (AIMS), now in its second year (Flannery & Pierce, 2000).

But perhaps their most interesting results came between 1993 and 1994, when a new test came along: Arizona's pioneering, but ill-fated

FIGURE 4.1 TAP SCORES: READING

***Test of Academic Proficiency (TAP), Grade 10, 1992-95***

| | READING | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Percentile Ranks | | | |
| | Sept. 92 | Oct. 93 | Oct. 94 | Oct. 95 |
| GUHSD | 57 | 61 | 61 | 63 |
| Arizona | 49 | 51 | 51 | 51 |
| Nation | 47 | 47 | 48 | 48 |

*Source:* Glendale Union High School District (GUHSD) Longitudinal Achievement Data, Test of Academic Proficiency (TAP), Grade 10, 1992-95. Used by permission.

FIGURE 4.2 TAP SCORES: MATH

| | MATHEMATICS Percentile Ranks | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Sept. 92 | Oct. 93 | Oct. 94 | Oct. 95 |
| GUHSD | 57 | 59 | 56 | 57 |
| Arizona | 45 | 48 | 47 | 45 |
| Nation | 48 | 48 | 49 | 49 |

*Source:* Glendale Union High School District (GUHSD) Longitudinal Achievement Data, Test of Academic Proficiency (TAP), Grade 10, 1992–95. Used by permission.

FIGURE 4.3 STANFORD 9: DATA

***Stanford 9 Test Data, April, 1997-99***

| | Grade 9 | | | Grade 10 | | | Grade 11 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| READING | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 |
| GUHSD | 47 | 50 | 49 | 47 | 50 | 49 | 53 | 54 | 52 |
| Arizona | 43 | 44 | 43 | 42 | 42 | 42 | 46 | 46 | 44 |

| | Grade 9 | | | Grade 10 | | | Grade 11 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| LANGUAGE | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 |
| GUHSD | 48 | 48 | 47 | 52 | 52 | 51 | 54 | 52 | 52 |
| Arizona | 37 | 39 | 39 | 43 | 43 | 44 | 42 | 43 | 42 |

| | Grade 9 | | | Grade 10 | | | Grade 11 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MATHEMATICS | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 |
| GUHSD | 65 | 68 | 67 | 53 | 58 | 57 | 60 | 61 | 63 |
| Arizona | 54 | 57 | 57 | 46 | 47 | 49 | 49 | 51 | 52 |

*Source:* Glendale Union High School District (GUHSD) Longitudinal Achievement Data, Stanford 9 Test Data, April, 1997–99. Used by permission.

performance assessment, the Arizona State Assessment Program (ASAP). It required children to write, to explain their thinking processes, and to solve complex math problems. Glendale's experience in formal, outcome-based writing and performance assessment gave them a clear edge on the ASAP (see Figure 4.4). Their scores were markedly higher than the state and county average and, according to long-time board member Richard Stapley,

> We were number 1 in the Phoenix area. We are on the West side, and poorer socioeconomically. In spite of that, our performance-based program pushed us to be number one. Both times it was administered, we were at the head of the heap.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

FIGURE 4.4 ASAP: DATA

***ASAP (Arizona Student Assessment Program), Grade 12, 1993-94***

| | Score | |
|---|---|---|
| READING | Mar. 93 | Feb. 94 |
| GUHSD | 11.2 | 9.2 |
| Maricopa County | 9.3 | 7.9 |
| Arizona | 9.2 | 7.6 |

Highest possible score = 20

| MATHEMATICS | Mar. 93 | Feb. 94 |
|---|---|---|
| GUHSD | 7.4 | 8.9 |
| Maricopa County | 5.8 | 6.8 |
| Arizona | 5.6 | 6.2 |

Highest possible score = 16

| WRITING | Mar. 93 | Feb. 94 |
|---|---|---|
| GUHSD | 5.9 | 5.7 |
| Arizona | 5.1 | 4.7 |
| Nation | 5.1 | 4.5 |

Highest possible score = 8

*Source:* Glendale Union High School District (GUHSD) Longitudinal Achievement Data, Arizona Student Assessment Program (ASAP), Grade 12, 1993–94. Used by permission.

Sadly, as has happened in places like Colorado's Littleton School District, controversy dogged the ASAP, and it died an early death. Nonetheless, their ASAP scores affirmed their innovative efforts in performance-based assessment. As Stapley points out, "We're certain it was because of our system of learning."

And a system it is, as thorough and complete as any you'll find. Glendale's program for instructional improvement and its end-of-course performance assessments continue to thrive and expand. Now 14 years old, the system gets better every year. It is produced by teachers, for teachers, and is refined by teachers. Because of this, the system is a *tour de force* of organization and the marshalling of collective genius.

## Teamwork and "Alignment" in Glendale Union

Jan Rowe is the recently retired assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction in Glendale Union, where she started as a teacher almost 30 years ago. A prominent, opening quote in her presentation materials is by Rosabeth Moss Kanter, of Harvard Business School. It is worth including here:

> When people are treated as the main engine rather than interchangeable parts of the machine, motivation, creativity, quality, and commitment to implementation will go up. Treat everyone as a source of creative input.

In this, Glendale Union excels. Only teachers, working together, could produce the staggering

array of high-quality assessments and instructional materials they have developed over the years.

Department teams meet regularly—every week or two—in Glendale's schools. Alignment between effort and results is essential to this teamwork. Jim Kieffer makes this point by referring to a chapter from Peter Senge's (1990) *The Fifth Discipline* entitled "Team Learning." Senge writes that "unaligned" teams work hard but produce very little; "alignment is the *necessary condition*" (his emphasis) for effective teaming. Senge goes on to point out that

> team learning is the process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members truly desire. . . . Empowering the individual when there is a relatively low level of alignment worsens the chaos and makes managing the team even more difficult (p. 236).

If alignment is the enemy of chaos, then how do we achieve it?

## The Genius of End-of-Course Assessments

Here, as at the Adlai Stevenson School District (see Chapter 1), it is through end-of-course assessments. We are what we assess: The systematic administration of these assessments, for every course, provide the alignment and "coherence" that Fullan has told us is primarily a function of common assessment (Schmoker, 1999, p. viii). For Debbie Perantoni, district math coordinator at Cortez High School,

> The assessments give us a framework for knowing what students need to succeed in the next grade level. There aren't holes in their learning. We teach around that framework. Since you know what's on the assessment, *you can develop and share very good instructional materials with others that align with the assessments*. . . . I'm a better teacher because it allows us to move forward in a cohesive direction.

**Coherence** is achieved by dint of Glendale Union's simple, organized system for *developing, sharing, and refining common end-of-course assessments for every course taught in its schools*, from chemistry to Accelerated French. It includes a system for tabulating results annually and semiannually for accountability and improvement purposes. As elegant and impressive as it is, the system's essential features—like every other system in these chapters—are eminently replicable.

We will look at samples of these assessments in a show-and-tell format, allowing the quality of these assessments and rubrics to speak for themselves. But first, let's look at the simple structures for creating them. The engine for creating these and for capturing the collective genius of Glendale Union's teachers is their summer workshops. The focus on assessments and their improvement is what provides the alignment that Senge considers essential to productive teamwork.

## The Summer Workshops

Among the most widely squandered resources in public education is summertime. Even with existing funds, we could purchase at least some of this valuable time for instructional improvement purposes. Glendale Union invests a comparatively hefty 5 percent of its annual budget in staff development, a significant portion of which pays for the summer workshops. The work they do here is the best kind of staff development.

Each June, Glendale Union teachers have the opportunity to voluntarily attend these workshops. They receive $100 per day to

- Score end-of-course performance-based assessments—by the thousands.
- Review state and national standards to align them with their instruction and the end-of-course assessments.

• Refine the end-of-course assessments and rubrics that are being field-tested.

• Develop and share instructional materials, units, and lessons aimed at meeting the common standards—by course.

Could anything be simpler—or more powerful? Again, even with conventional funding (and school funding in Arizona is ranked dead last among the states) (Bowman, 2000), Glendale Union demonstrates that *there is no reason any willing district couldn't conduct such summer sessions.*

Though the workshops are voluntary, a high proportion of faculty attend them. Those who don't attend still benefit immeasurably from them and have the power to appeal for adjustments to any instructional or curricular decisions made.

The results of these workshops are available to anyone. In Glendale's highly user-friendly *Annual Report* to the governing board (the best of its kind I've seen), we find "Summer Workshop Highlights" and "Summer Workshop Accomplishments." In succinct, but surprisingly rich detail, they describe innumerable refinements for each department and course. For instance,

• In *foreign language*, even in a district that is already miles ahead in providing an authentic, practical language-learning experience, they have "continued to refine expectations for each of the strands in writing."

• In *math*, they are working to improve "assessment items, assessment structure and the grading process." They have developed new materials "to support restructured math curriculum in precalculus, Math 5–6 and Accelerated Math 1–4."

• In *science*, they are "streamlining and improving performance assessments in Physics and Chemistry."

• In *language arts*, they are "streamlining the assessment schedule" by "moving the interdisciplinary project to social studies with English teachers providing support in the research process."

Participation is such that just about every teacher rotates through these summer workshops; about half of the teachers—sometimes more—are there each summer to represent the department or course. Nonetheless, changes to the common assessments—and hence to what is taught—are sensitive stuff. For math, as for all course assessments, we find the caveat that

• The suggestions are always subject to approval by all math teachers.

• An essential, democratic procedure is used for promoting buy-in.

• They also generate and create lessons and materials to support the end-of-course assessments.

In the *Annual Report* we find the following summary of a math workshop:

> **June 15–19: Math Materials Development Workshop**
>
> • Generated Unit Materials for the new precalculus text that most schools have chosen.
>
> • Generated writing/performance type questions and activities for Math 5–6, to supplement existing unit materials.
>
> • Generated writing/performance type questions and activities for Accelerated Math 1–4, to supplement the existing unit materials. Also, made modifications to unit materials to include higher order thinking skills and more rigor.

The workshop produced units, questions, and activities. The materials addressed higher-order skills and provided for ever-increasing rigor. All materials aligned with assessments; all focused on emergent strengths or weaknesses they saw in that year's performance assessments.

It's obvious that Glendale takes writing seriously in all subjects—including math. As Kieffer states, their belief is that writing should be part of all performance-based assessment, for the simple reason that "writing is thinking." We'll see this doubly emphasized in the section on rubric and

assessment data, which includes numerical subscores for "language conventions" on the *math* assessment.

**Scoring assessments—by the Thousands**

The anchor for all this aligned activity is the performance assessments themselves. Everything comes together here as teachers immerse themselves in student work for days at a time, scoring and re-scoring the assessments (at least twice). This is to determine the number of students who succeed but also, as English Coordinator Sue Maland stressed, "to see if there was any pattern among those who failed." The patterns become that year's improvement focus.

**Teacher Reports**

In every subject, summer workshop participants grade essays and performance assessments by the thousands. Let's look at some numbers and additional information from the Annual Report. Under "Summer Workshop Highlights: Mathematics" we find this item:

> [Graded 1,329 Math 1–2 [freshmen] assessments and 1,355 Math 3–4 [sophomore] assessments

But not before they have

> **Conducted training sessions, which provide excellent staff development opportunities. The training consists of:**
>
> • familiarization with assessment tasks
> • review of anchor papers to establish clear grading guidelines
> • clarification discussions to ensure as much grading consistency as possible

In science, they have also discussed streamlining test administration, worked to align assessments with new state standards, suggested improvements to both assessments and their respective rubrics, and then graded

> • 1,211 Thinking Science Assessments
> • 1,143 Biology assessments
> • 757 Chemistry assessments
> • 207 Physics assessments

In social studies, we find

> **Government and Free Enterprise**
>
> • We held our first scoring workshop for the new problem-based assessment.
> • Teachers agreed upon an interpretation of the rubric after reading several anchor papers.
> • 12 teachers read 650 papers twice.
> • Teachers discussed what they learned by reading the student work. They were then able to clarify their goals and expectations for teaching and learning next year.

And for their integrated English/social studies assessment:

> **Interdisciplinary (United States History and English 5–6)**
>
> • This was the fourth year for this assessment.
> • Teachers agreed upon an interpretation of the rubric after reading several anchor papers.
> • 35 teachers read and scored 1,350 papers twice.
> • Teachers were debriefed for their insight into what students were able to do and what problems students had with the paper.
> • Teachers agreed that the papers this year were the best that had been produced.

The point here, again, is simply to show you what these people do, in their own words from their own report documents. A close look at these documents reveals that none of it is beyond any of us; it is the result of sensible planning, which is creativity's best friend.

This doesn't only happen for the core courses. We find the same summer activities in the applied technology department: from *Woods* to *Intro Tech*; for *Computer Applications I and II*—even for written, performance-based assessments in physical educa

tion (PE), where the report tells us they have just "field-tested the 9th grade performance-based assessment." As of this writing, they have just completed and field-tested such assessments for all PE courses.

These summer workshops have made a precious contribution: They have improved the quality of lessons and assessments and ensured a high level of alignment and consistency, all in a setting that celebrates collective analysis and creativity.

It's quite a system. But the most exciting discovery occurs when we examine the actual instructional and assessment materials that the system produces. They are a new teacher's dream, a cornucopia of rich, accessible resources of a kind that I hope my own kids will have the benefit of someday.

## The Genius of Teachers: Samples of Glendale's Performance Assessments and Supporting Materials

I'm a little breathless when I review Glendale's rubrics and assessments. I wish I could share a more generous sampling than this chapter permits. Their quality, in the core courses and beyond, is a testament to the collective creativity of public school teachers. See if you don't see the logic, clarity, and simplicity in the samples that follow.

### English

It all began in the English Department. Performance assessment has always had a friend in writing, which (too often) has been the exclusive province of the English department. Writing, in any field, allows us to explore issues and ideas up and down every level of Bloom's Taxonomy—the evaluation, application, and synthesis that we know are important to cultivate.

The English Department established a certain mode of writing assessment for each course. As they have seen students' capacity to reach higher levels of performance, the sophistication of these assessments has increased. At one time, freshmen were only required to write a well-crafted, one-paragraph summary of an article—an important skill and a stepping stone to good essay-writing. But as increasing numbers of students mastered the "Summary," the English faculties realized that freshmen were up to writing a full-blown essay as the end-of course performance assessment for 9th grade.

A five-paragraph "Explanatory Essay" is now required for freshmen; an "Evaluation Essay" for sophomores; a "Persuasive Essay" for juniors; and a "Literary Analysis Essay" for seniors. Throughout the year, students have multiple opportunities to improve their skills on each of these and other forms of writing. But the single, common essay for each course provides an efficient, consistent "system check," as they call it, for all Glendale Union students.

There is a rubric for each respective form. In addition, there are prompts or "Possible Topics," like the following for the freshman "Explanation" essay:

- The disadvantages of being tardy to class.
- The advantages of being/not being an only child.
- The advantages of being involved in extracurricular activities.
- Some irritating habits of American drivers.

First in English, then in all areas, the system evolved to encourage consistency, scrutiny, and ever more ambitious levels of challenge—and attainment. Later, we'll see how Glendale makes its most distinctive leap: from not only scoring, re-scoring, discussing, clarifying, and streamlining, but to *keeping score*—and letting the public see that score. But first, let's take a closer look at some of these actual tasks, rubrics, and assessments.

### Science

**"Thinking Science."** Every 9th grader takes a course called "Thinking Science." The title is appropriate. The outline immediately indicates that this is not your usual, freshman-level "General Science" course. The course is explicitly designed to inculcate, in every kid, a sophisticated, scientific mindset. The course requires an exceptional number of hands-on labs. Teacher Bernie Verhoeven, one of its architects, emphasized that the course and the summative assessment are designed to ensure that anyone teaching "Thinking Science" must go beyond the textbook.

It is obvious from the course topics that we're in for a different kind of science course. First, students learn "Enabling skills: Graphing, metrics, basic math, scientific method." That is followed by "Variables (classification)." Second-semester topics include "Compensation . . . Probability . . . Correlation." The detailed explanations for these arcane-sounding topics reveal how serious the Glendale Union science teachers are about having kids understand the language and concepts of scientific experimentation. For example, for "III. Probability/Combination of variables,"

> The student will make predictions based on probability and combinations of variables and justify his answer.

I watched Bernie and another teacher, Linda Bailey, walk through one of their experiments. The experiment, like the carefully crafted materials that accompany it, hints strongly that it is the product of many minds and years of refinement. This user-friendly, visually pleasing 19-page booklet, its instructions, even the use of different fonts and graphics, are a model of simplicity and clarity. At every stage, there is space provided for students to create graphic organizers and clear, concise rubrics to evaluate their progress *on each successive stage* of the experiment. There are lined spaces where they can list "Observations . . . Variables . . . Proposed Explanation (Hypothesis)," and then "Controlled Variables." There are clear instructions on time allotted for phases of the work, even tips on how to optimally arrange your working space.

"Thinking Science" prepares students for all subsequent science courses, not by ignoring content (as we'll see, the district takes the content in textbooks quite seriously) but by ensuring that students bring a scientific mindset to that content.

Let's see how this preparation is linked to other science courses.

**Chemistry and Physics.** Note how both of the following end-of-course performance assessments require students to think experimentally and to imagine the real-world implications of the discipline. Here's the "Outcome" and "Task Overview" for the Chemistry Assessment:

> **Outcome:** Given a chemistry related problem within a societal context, the student will conduct an investigation and analyze the resulting data.

The description goes on to define "Societal context" as a "real life setting in contemporary society . . . of concern to students as citizens." This compelling, "real-life" emphasis is a common theme in all their performance assessments.

For physics, we find a similar outcome and overview.

> **Outcome:** Given a physics related problem, the student will conduct an investigation, analyze the findings, and apply these findings to a new situation
>
> **Task Overview and Context:**
>
> The student will
>
> 1. Receive information and related data that describes the problem in physics.
> 2. Design an experiment that would test variables related to the problem.
> 3. Collaboratively collect data.
> 4. Construct a table of values that includes raw data and mathematical manipulations of data.

5. Individually write a conclusion of the experiment.
6. Determine a solution to the specific problem.
7. Evaluate the methodology and determine if results fall within acceptable experimental error.

A clear, list of "task Parameters/Special Conditions" follows. The final project must include such things as a "diagram of the experimental setup" and "error determination for measurement made."

There are rubrics for each of these. The same outcomes, overviews, task parameters, and conditions are provided for all other science courses.

The descriptions for all subject areas show this same clarity and the same emphasis on authentic and compelling intellectual challenges. Among my favorites is the work they have done in social studies.

**Social Studies**

One of the Social Studies Department's more recent refinements was to the "U.S. Government/ Free Enterprise Assessment." It is the offspring of what they used to call a "Document-based essay,"—but goes it one better by featuring, as we'll see, an "ill-structured" dimension that makes it an even more arresting intellectual exercise.

This is true "inquiry": the kind of research-based intellectual pursuit advocated by George Hillocks and Bruce Joyce, where "raw" information must be digested and transformed into a fresh but coherent form—like a solution or recommendation (Hillocks, 1987; Joyce, Showers, & Weil, 1992).

**Outcome:** When confronted with a situation dealing with governmental or economic issues that affect the United States, students will identify the problem, recommend a solution, and present it.

**Task Overview and Context**

The student will

1. Encounter an ill-structured problem within a situation and role
2. Use a reiterative reasoning process to define the problem.
3. Use the reiterative process to craft a solution.
4. Prepare a product that presents the solution.

I love the description of the steps in the "reiterative process," in the following example. They are in the "Parameters/Special Conditions" section that's included in all of the assessment outlines.

**The steps of the reiterative process include:**

1. Identify hunches/hypotheses by speculating on what might take place.
2. Determine what is known or needs to be known to validate hypotheses.
3. Search for and collect needed data.
4. Think critically to evaluate the data.
5. Think critically to evaluate the hypothesis.
6. Accept, reject, modify hypotheses and add new hypotheses.

Not enough of us, lamentably, had a chance to do such things in our own social studies courses: hunches, speculation, critical evaluation of data—and relevance. Remember that

The situation will directly affect social, political, or geographic or economic conditions in the United States.

It gets better. Let's look at "Situation and Role," also under "Parameters/Special Conditions."

**a) The problem will be "ill-structured," which:**

1. Is messy and incapable of being fully understood when first encountered.
2. Often changes its nature as more information is discovered about it through inquiry and investigation.
3. Defies solution by simple formula.
4. Requires careful consideration of the fit between solution and problem.

5. Illustrates the difficulty of being sure one has the "right answer" because the data can be missing or in conflict, even after an exhaustive investigation.
6. Has more than two possible solutions.

This is the stuff of thoughtful, genuine intellectual activity. And it is worth emphasizing that *students and parents in Glendale Union don't have to hope they'll get lucky and have a teacher who makes learning this engaging; all kids get this, and all are evaluated with the same rubrics.*

As good as this is, it may be no better than what any school or teacher team—given the opportunity—could produce. This is the kind of quality we'll get when teamwork is aligned to carefully selected outcomes and when we give teachers a chance to create and then refine curriculum and assessment, year after year. In such a system—poor or affluent, urban or rural—learning activities like these are inevitable.

### The Oral Presentation

Perhaps my favorite assessment is the one for the "Oral Presentation." As part of the requirement for "World History/Geography," *every student* in the district will perform for and be evaluated by an audience. Here, as well, teams of teachers take steps to ensure quality and consistency. Assistant Superintendent Jan Rowe describes this process:

> Every student has to . . . develop an oral presentation that includes visuals for an audience of teachers and peers. All kids will do the presentation in their classroom, or they will do an exchange and perform for another classroom. . . . It takes several days. For program system evaluation, students are randomly sampled from each class; three to four teachers and the [subject area] coordinator are the jury. Of course, students know the criteria, and it is not a surprise. Kids work at it all year, and they should have several opportunities [to practice in front of an audience].

This presentation process is time consuming, but the ability to speak with poise and clarity can do much to promote confidence, to help students make their way in the world. Our failure to give more students such an experience helps account for our widespread, well-documented fears of public speaking. This requirement is laudable, and worth the obvious trouble it takes.

Let's look at the concise but challenging rubric by which these presentations are juried. For brevity's sake, I'll provide only the "outstanding" level of performance.

> **World History/World Geography Rubric—Oral Presentation**
>
> **Outstanding Level:**
>
> **Delivery**
>
> • Uses sophisticated language that engages the audience.
>
> • Mannerisms, gestures, posture, and eye contact are close to professional standards.
>
> **Content**
>
> • Relevant and accurate information is thoroughly researched, logically organized, uses sophisticated vocabulary, and demonstrates a thorough understanding of the topic.
>
> • Demonstrates an in-depth historical significance with a highly appropriate aid.
>
> • Thoroughly explains the historical significance using the most appropriate and relevant facts.

This rubric's emphasis on thorough research, historical significance, effective language, and delivery make it a complete learning experience. I like to imagine graduation day, knowing that each student walking across the stage underwent such a rigorous intellectual evaluation by a jury of her teachers and peers.

### Math

In math, we find the same impressive degree of care and craft in the design of the assessments. Parts of it are worth including here:

> **Math Performance-Based Assessment Model**
> Students will demonstrate and analyze

mathematical problem-solving processes involving the use of algebra, geometry, data analysis, probability, statistics and trigonometry.

**Task Overview**

Students will

1. Read a contextualized math problem which requires analysis and interpretation.
2. Perform the mathematical operations necessary to solve the problem.
3. Write an analysis of the problem solving which addresses one or more of the following:
   - Explanation of how the problem was solved.
   - Justification of the problem-solving method.
   - Transfer of problem-solving process to a parallel problem.
   - Drawing and supporting conclusions from the problem situation.

Note the clarity and emphasis that the teams gave to the creative and interpretive aspect of the assessment. The "Task Parameters" go on to reiterate the importance of "context," "analysis," and "interpretation"—too often in short supply in instruction and assessment. For each item under #3, there is a short paragraph describing just what these terms mean, with examples, such as the following:

> (e.g., Which of two cars is most economical, based on calculations, and why?)

These are included in resource "notebooks" (described in the next section). But clearly, Glendale's assessments, notebooks, and other readable, accessible materials reveal their impulse to do everything possible to aid and assist teachers, both new and veteran, to cash in on the cumulative, collective value of teacher thought and work.

Finally, and in this same vein, there are 12 "Sample stems for analysis" of math problems, which must be written in narrative. A sampling:

- Write a report with recommendations to support your calculations/findings.
- From your calculations, what can you conclude/determine/predict?
- Propose an alternative procedure for solving a given problem. Which procedure is best and why?

Teacher or student, such questions are the scaffolding for great, imaginative work. By failing to organize and distribute such materials, we continue to deny teachers of their immense value (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). Fortunately, these processes and resources are taken just as seriously in the elective areas.

**Electives**

**Theatre Arts.** I've seen, up close, the chaos, inconsistency, and lack of rigor in secondary theatre courses. Glendale's "Theatre Arts Assessment Model" is decidedly different.

> **Outcome:** The student will evaluate herself in an acting performance and produce a written self-evaluation examining a strength and an area of improvement and growth.
>
> **Task Overview and Content:**
> The student will
>
> - Watch a video taped performance of himself.
> - Evaluate skills in their performance, based on given criteria.
> - Write a self-evaluation.

The "outstanding" level of their rubric requires students to be able to articulate the criteria for a good performance, demonstrate their knowledge of theatre terms, identify and build on areas of strength, and address areas of weakness. Just showing up won't cut it here; in this course, as in the next, students must demonstrate skills and their mastery of a body of knowledge.

**Simple, *Practical* Foreign Language Assessment.** In Foreign Language, the emphasis is on practical speaking and writing skills. The aim is for students to be able to respond, with facility and fluency, to a given prompt.

The "Speaking Performance" asks students to respond—spontaneously—to three open-ended prompts and then to describe a picture or series of pictures for one minute (a revealing, but still time-efficient assessment). The rubric has three categories: "Communication," "Accuracy of Spoken Language," and "Fluency." Let's look at the "outstanding" level for

> **Communication:**
>
> For the level of study, the oral response is:
> - Predominantly comprehensible.
> - Appropriate.
> - Varied in detail.

The criteria for the other two categories are similarly clear and concise.

The assessment design and rubric for the "Foreign Language Writing Performance" are just as straightforward, reflecting the eminent common sense of their creators: First year requires a 75-word essay written in response to a prompt; 2nd year students write a 100-word essay; 3rd year students, 150 words; and 4th year students, 200 words.

In an area where the ability to actually "perform" is so obvious—not get a good grade, or merely complete the course—Glendale's teachers come through, once again. And once again, when you meet any student who has completed a foreign language course at any of its nine schools, you can actually be confident that this kid can talk and write at least nominally well in a real situation. That is quite an achievement.

*But it is within any school's reach.* Anyone can use or improve on these rubrics and assessment tasks. I have included a number of these assessments, rubrics, and resources to showcase the clarity, common sense, and organization that is manifest in Glendale's work, but also to demystify such products. When expertise and information are rightly managed, quality and improvement like Glendale's is within everyone's reach.

## The Glendale Instructional Management System: An Apparatus for Improvement

Glendale Union is truly "organized for improvement." They have assembled personnel and created structures, schedules, and routines that allow them to stay focused, to collect, organize, disseminate, monitor, and refine practical knowledge in the service of results.

The backbone of this infrastructure is what they call the "Instructional Management System" (IMS). The alignment and the standards-based assessments and rubrics we've been looking at are the product of this system. An internal document describes the IMS "department" as

> a network of personnel and resources which works closely with teachers and local school administrators in a variety of ways to promote curriculum alignment and development.

The department consists of the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, the director of testing, the director of vocational education, and the director of research and assessment. But one of its most interesting features is its six curriculum coordinators, representing language, science, mathematics, social studies/fine arts, foreign language, and computer education. As we'll see, these curriculum coordinators are not conventional department heads.

### "Keepers of the Curriculum"

The document describing the Instructional Management System begins, appropriately, with "Personnel." They make it hum.

A few years ago, I spent an afternoon learning about the Glendale system with the

members of the IMS department. It was one of the most gratifying experiences of my professional life. I had a rough sense of what they were about, but didn't anticipate that they would have so many bases covered. They had an answer for every question—usually on paper. Their system for sustaining, improving and monitoring instruction addressed so many of the needs and challenges of public schools—without being unduly complicated.

Personnel make the difference. Real credit goes to Jan Rowe, the long-time assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. She shepherded the process for some years, demonstrating, as in Oak Park (see Chapter 3), that even where leadership is so clearly shared—as it is in Glendale—someone at the central office must "mind the store." Rowe orchestrated the IMS department's activities with passion and conscientiousness.

Nonetheless, *no single person* has the time or expertise to ensure an effective instructional program in every subject area. For this reason, Glendale distributes these functions among teachers or subject-area specialists for their on-the-ground leadership and assistance. As Stevenson (see Chapter 1) and Oak Park (Chapter 3) have done, Glendale compensates them with additional funding or release time.

Rowe appropriately describes the six curriculum coordinators as the "keepers of the curriculum." They ensure quality in what is taught, learned, and assessed. Specifically, the "keepers" coordinate

- Summer workshops.
- Assessment building, field-testing of new assessments and rubrics.
- Scoring and data collection for the thousands of student end-of-course assessments.
- Creation and dissemination of effective lessons, units, and instructional materials aligned to standards-based assessments.
- Training in effective instructional methods for all teachers.

Look carefully at this list: it is anything but a typical job description for a department head. And they do more than coordinate: They actually review performance data and set up meetings at schools with the various departments to discuss the specific patterns of weakness to assist them with improvement.

Sue Maland, language arts coordinator, told me that after reviewing the data, she "spends a lot of time in the Fall going out to visit teams or individuals with strategies to help them improve." They even occasionally arrange visits and substitute teachers to allow a team from one school to visit another school whose teachers are getting exceptionally good results in a given area.

In this way, the coordinators help the district to develop, organize—and strategically focus—its internal expertise. Another way this is done is through the collection and distribution of effective lessons and materials.

### An Intellectual Harvest: Lesson and Unit "Notebooks"

We've already seen Glendale's formal structures for creating and administering end-of-course assessments. And, like the Adlai Stevenson district, which administers end-of-course assessments, Glendale also organizes teachers to develop lessons specifically designed to address difficult learning objectives.

The performance assessments are themselves instructional resources. As Wiggins (1998) and others have made clear, the best assessments don't just test; they teach. They are learning activities in the best sense and are thus, in Wiggins term, "educative assessment." Glendale's "assessment Models," like those we've seen, are the substance of an actual curriculum. The writing, speaking, thinking, and researching described in detail in the assessments and the accompanying "Task Overview," "Parameters and Special Conditions," and scoring guides contain a wealth of learning activities. They are, indeed, "models." *They serve as*

*templates for the kinds of lessons that should be taught all year*, ensuring the alignment necessary for mastery of the final, end-of-course standards that teachers have deemed most important.

In addition to the assessments, Glendale formally "banks," reproduces, and then distributes units and lessons. Liz Tataseo, the district's science and "lead" coordinator, told me,

> We plan specific days during the year for teachers to present different topics and to share and distribute lessons aligned to state standards. We bring teachers together to develop written materials and we send those out to teachers in notebooks. Language Arts has been sending notebooks out for several years and then math and science began to do it.

This helps mightily when a new state test—like Arizona's new high-stakes AIMS test—arrives. Sue Maland, language arts coordinator, had observed with her colleagues that the new test

> contained many items having to do with memos and letters. We didn't have enough of that in our curriculum. So we invited anyone who wanted to come and help us to design specific lessons to address that particular gap.

These are added to the notebooks. Like the trove of lessons in Stevenson's department files, these notebooks don't just provide great resources; they send a message: that focused, effective, collectively crafted lessons and instructional resources are of great value to the system—to children. All lessons are not created equal: The ongoing replication and collective refinement of teachers' best work dignifies teacher expertise and aspiration. As Stigler and Hiebert (1999) advocate, we should stop "reforming schools," and start developing—and publishing and disseminating—excellent, aligned lessons. That is the most direct and sensible route to substantive school improvement. The following are good examples:

• **In Science,** the multipage practice assessment booklets created by Bernie Verhoeven's science team are published for use by everyone in the system. The booklets contain everything a teacher needs to conduct "thinking science" activities with students: clear graphics, step-by-step procedures, space for graphic organizers, and observations and rubrics for each "phase" of the experiment.

• **In United States Government and Free Enterprise,** teachers have created a similarly attractive, 20-page document containing an entire unit entitled "The Campaign Consultant," with the subtitle "'Problem-Based Unit' Practice Problem." It is replete with minilessons, helpful questions, and research prompts, even an "electoral tracking map"—and, again, rubrics for students to self-evaluate each section of their work. All of this is aimed at clear, explicit content and thinking-process goals. For each day, the unit includes a clear "Coaching Plan" for the teacher. Students are asked to ponder and propose complex, authentic activities. For example, here's an interesting one: "How does one interpret polling data so as to determine where the candidate should spend the last two weeks of the campaign?"

## The Unsung Benefits of Common Standards

As the standards movement enters a period of needed self-scrutiny (Sack, 2000), we forget that standards-based education, though we've botched many aspects of it (Schmoker & Marzano, 1999), is chiefly about something incontrovertible: the indisputable value of a *common instructional currency*. It is this commonality that so mightily promotes clarity, focused interaction, and thus collective invention. Glendale teachers Debra Perantoni (district math coordinator) and Christine Sideris (language arts chair at Washington High School) pointed out how common standards gave them focus, direction, and priority—making sharing natural and productive.

Whole states, schools, and districts have found that the common standards contained in writing rubrics have profoundly increased the number of students who can write well (Schmoker, 1999). In the same way, Glendale Union reveals how common standards can give us the practical product of many minds: rich, increasingly mature lessons, assessment models, and learning units.

Washington High School Principal Virginia Gibney (a former coordinator) believes that children have a right to a system with common standards—and that these act as a kind of instructional insurance. She states:

> In Glendale Union, regardless of whether your children are at the poor or the rich school, you can know that your kids are learning the same things, with the same expectations. We used to say "Our kids are too poor, so you can't teach them this or that." Not anymore. The greatest benefit of common standards and assessments is that because teachers have the same high expectations, they can collaborate to find ways to help kids reach those expectations. They can ask, "What do we need to change, what instructional tools do we need to make sure all kids learn this?" We'd have a lot of kids not doing well, then within two or three years, maybe 80 percent of the kids were learning it. It happens all the time.

In right measure, and for the same reasons, perhaps a certain "standardization" of proven strategies and tools may be in order.

### Using Research to Help *All* Students Read

We have seen how Oak Park has benefited in every subject area from its emphasis on the SQ3R method. Glendale is just as obsessive about a related reading improvement method known as "reciprocal reading" (also called "reciprocal teaching").

They picked a good one. In their book on research-based practices, David Berliner and Ursula Casanova (1996) tell us that this method, created by Palinscar and Brown, "produces startling results!" It is the only method over which they gush so unabashedly. In many ways, it resembles SQ3R in that it asks students, as they read a text, to review, question, summarize, predict, or restate. Sue Maland points out:

> We use Palinscar . . . and train all teachers, regardless of content. Each school has a facilitator who does follow-up and peer coaching. We start with students during their freshman year and teach it explicitly. We like to begin with freshman science and English teachers so students have strategies for attacking difficult text. . . . Students need to be reading. If we don't expect kids to be responsible and accountable for reading, they become "aliterate" [indifferent to reading].

A crippling and pervasive problem is being addressed here. Those of us who have taught high school know that by this time, students' reading ability can vary wildly. Many kids just aren't up to reading literary and scientific texts. My hat is off to Glendale and Oak Park—districts that have made a concerted commitment to equip kids with strategies that can close this gap.

And in another coup (as we'll see with Brazosport in Chapter 5), students who are not reading up to standard receive additional opportunities in what every such student deserves in secondary school: a daily, additional required reading course.

### On-Site Teacher Mentors

Here, too, the system benefits from another set of teacher leaders: the "Mentors" who teach only two periods out of five, so that they can work with new Glendale teachers during their first three years in the district. Liz Tataseo described their

> three-year mentor program, with a teacher mentor on each campus. They work with first through third year teachers, teaching classroom management, essential elements of instruction, cooperative learning and reciprocal teaching. . . . They also attend summer training where they are introduced to their content so that they know the content and the defined curriculum and assessments.

So-called "mentors" are everywhere these days, but they aren't often given release time or a clear, compelling charge: in this case, to ensure that all teachers know the content and assessments that are the coin of the realm in Glendale Union schools.

This is true "instructional management." But another indispensable aspect of managing instruction is monitoring its effectiveness—with data. In this, Glendale Union has achieved something truly exceptional.

### *Data-Driven* Performance Assessment

Most educators value performance assessment, and most districts have invested heavily in some form of training in it. And yet, after years of such study and preparations, it is extremely difficult to find schools or districts that have data on how well students are performing on such assessments—even in the area of writing.

As a member of a national assessment consortium, I noticed that for all our many meetings, presentations, and dialogue, the member districts could not answer some basic questions:

- How many or what percentage of students are succeeding on key performance assessments?
- Did students perform better this year than last?
- In what areas of the performance assessments were students strong? Or weak?

Not only can Glendale Union answer these critical questions, but they can do so in simple, comprehensible terms *for every course in their curriculum*. I have yet to come across a system that so impressively blends comprehensive, performance-based assessment with a simple, effective data-driven scheme.

Much credit goes to another multitalented member of Glendale Union's Instructional Management department. Marc Becker is the director of research and assessment. He is one of the primary architects and custodians of this enlightened and data-driven system. Becker organizes and contributes significantly to the *Annual Report to the Governing Board on Student Achievement*. It contains, under one cover, all the information on the summer workshops we've seen in the preceding sections. But the document also contains clear, accessible information and data about student progress in Glendale Union.

Figure 4.5 shows, at a glance, how students are performing and progressing, year to year, course to course. This makes monitoring—and hence improvement—possible.

Every school receives a similar graph with its own data, but with an additional column containing the district average, as well. At a glance, and for every course, it can tell us how we've progressed over the last four years and how well we currently perform in comparison with the district as a whole. These data allow a school or course team to feel pride for its accomplishments or to see new levels to which it should aspire.

### Safety—In Numbers

You may be wondering what the asterisks in Figure 4.5 refer to—or noticing that they are next to declining scores. These asterisks constitute an elegant solution to a real problem. Each year, Glendale teams set measurable improvement goals. When, over time, high numbers of students are earning high scores on the assessments, it only makes sense to up the ante for success: The teams deliberately increase their difficulty or complexity.

Predictably, this can reduce the number of students succeeding on the exams. During this time, teachers are adjusting to the new curriculum and acquiring the new teaching skills and developing the aligned lessons needed to help students reach these now-higher standards and proficiencies.

That's where the asterisks—or blank cells—come in. They tell the community that the test is a pilot, or is under construction; judgments about results should be deferred. In this way, experiment

FIGURE 4.5 SOCIAL STUDIES ACHIEVEMENT

| SOCIAL STUDIES | 94-95 | 95-96 | 96-97 | 97-98 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Multiple Choice | Mean Percent Items Correct | | | |
| World History/World Geography/AZ Geography | 86 | 87 | ** 86 | 86 |
| US/AZ History | 85 | 83 | | **72 |
| US/AZ Government/Free Enterprise | 88 | 89 | 88 | 87 |
| Performance Based | Percent Successful or Better | | | |
| World History/World Geography/AZ Geography | 64 | 65 | 64 | 70 |
| US History/English 5-6 Interdisciplinary | 72 | 72 | 70 | √82 |
| US/AZ Government/Free Enterprise | 76 | 77 | | **71 |

*Source:* Glendale Union High School District (GUHSD) Longitudinal Achievement Data, Annual Report, 1998. Used by permission.

and improvement are encouraged; higher standards aren't held hostage by a simplistic obsession with higher numbers or success rates. And to avoid overload or undue upheaval, only a limited number of courses and assessments are revamped during any given year.

These simple measures ensure a self-renewing system where (1) assessments increasingly reflect more current and challenging standards and (2) ever-greater numbers of students are rising to these new challenges.

The system reflects an appropriate concern with safety. As researcher Susan Rosenholtz (1991) found, successful schools avoided creating an ego-endangering environment (p. 6). Jan Rowe stressed that over the years the district has learned to avoid using data to embarrass schools or teachers or to promote an unwholesome competition. She stated:

> Jim [Kieffer] and I have talked a lot about how to use the data. It is *not* used in teacher evaluation. We educate all our administrators not to use data as a hammer. Of course we talk about scores and performance and program evaluation. We have to be concerned with how many of our children are successful. . . . But the competitive emphasis has lessened in the last 10 years. We used to compare schools, but haven't done that in years. Now we talk about continuous improvement.

## System Evaluation, System Improvement

Because such data are kept and reviewed by the Information Management Team, the district can develop the kind of system evaluation and improvement that only data afford: the opportunity to see which teams are doing well or poorly in which subjects and at which schools.

Such data make possible the important process of data review and visits by the "keepers of the curriculum"—the subject area coordinators. As we've seen, these staff members annually review the data, identify low-scoring teams, visit the teams, and then assist them in addressing the areas of skill and knowledge most in need of attention.

How do they identify these specific areas of weakness?

**Breakdowns: Strength and Weakness**

There is another priceless feature of the reports Becker provides—with the help of Ed Moriarty, the district's administrator of information and technology, whose original software makes it possible and whose system ensures high levels of reliability (see box, "Rating Thousands of Papers").

The reports also provide highly specific comparative data like that shown in Figures 4.6 and 4.7 for most courses—and for every school. The figures, showing world history/geography research, oral assessment, and biology laboratory assessment are taken right from the *Annual Report to the Governing Board on Student Achievement*.

As we can see, the data call our attention to "Historical Significance" on the world history assessment; to "Data Display" on the biology assessment. In addition, we get to see other nuances—like the percentage breakdown among students who not only succeeded but attained the "highly successful" or "outstanding" levels. Such data create yet another opportunity for high-achieving teams to aspire higher even once the percentage of students "above the line" creeps into the 90s.

**The Value of Data**

Without these numbers, what do we have? No way to perceive need, to target improvement effort; no way to organize focused assistance; no way to identify and seek assistance from the most successful teacher teams. As teacher Bernie Verhoeven puts it,

> We need accountability. In construction, you can see the guy did—or didn't—dig a ditch. In teaching, it's harder. You need that data

As the work of psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1990) so compellingly illustrates, people's sense of pride and progress depend on the availability of precise, palpable feedback. For Glendale Union Superintendent Jim Kieffer,

**Rating Thousands of Papers Accurately**

The following process helps ensure rater consistency. First, a certain number of student assessments are randomly picked and numbered. Each one is matched with its student number and name so that the subject area coordinator can trace the paper back to the student, if need be.

The raters are then given the papers to rate, and the rubric scoring of the paper is recorded on a "bubble" sheet. The raters also enter their own rater number on the bubble sheet. An optical scanner reads these sheets, and the information is stored in a data file.

After the papers have been rated twice, the data file is processed by a system called FACETS. FACETS will rate the raters by leniency or severity based on the scores recorded on the same papers rated by other raters in the group. The system also provides information on item difficulty, prompt difficulty, and rater consistency. This allows the system to give more credit to papers rated by severe raters and less credit to papers rated by lenient raters. The paper's two scores are then averaged, and the total population of papers is then analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the teaching program.

➤ *For more information, contact Ed Moriarty at 623-435-6049.*

## FIGURE 4.6 WORLD HISTORY/GEOGRAPHY: RESEARCH ORAL ASSESSMENT

(Percent of Students by Level of Achievement)

| LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT | DISTRICT 759 ASSESSED |
|---|---|
| % STUDENTS SUCCESSFUL OR BETTER | 70% |
| OUTSTANDING | 4% |
| HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL | 24% |
| SUCCESSFUL | 42% |
| NOT YET SUCCESSFUL | 23% |
| PREREQ. NOT MET | 7% |

DISTRICT

| LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT | VOICE 759 ASSESSED | BODY LANGUAGE 759 ASSESSED | CONTENT 759 ASSESSED | VISUAL AID 759 ASSESSED | HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE 759 ASSESSED |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| % STUDENTS SUCCESSFUL OR BETTER | 93% | 83% | 83% | 82% | 77% |
| NOT YET SUCCESSFUL | 0% | 8% | 8% | 11% | 16% |
| PREREQ. NOT MET | 7% | 7% | 7% | 7% | 7% |

*Source:* Glendale Union High School District (GUHSD) Longitudinal Achievement Data, Annual Report, 1998. Used by permission.

## FIGURE 4.7 BIOLOGY LABORATORY ASSESSMENT

(Percent of Students by Level of Achievement)

| LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT | DISTRICT 1143 ASSESSED |
|---|---|
| % STUDENTS SUCCESSFUL OR BETTER | 79% |
| OUTSTANDING | 2% |
| HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL | 36% |
| SUCCESSFUL | 41% |
| NOT YET SUCCESSFUL | 21% |
| PREREQ. NOT MET | 0% |

DISTRICT

| LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT | PROBLEM 1143 ASSESSED | PURPOSE 1143 ASSESSED | DATA DISPLAY 1143 ASSESSED | ANALYSIS & CONCLUSION 1143 ASSESSED | LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS 1143 ASSESSED |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| % STUDENTS SUCCESSFUL OR BETTER | 95% | 94% | 83% | 90% | 98% |
| NOT YET SUCCESSFUL | 5% | 6% | 17% | 10% | 2% |
| PREREQ. NOT MET | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |

*Source:* Glendale Union High School District (GUHSD) Longitudinal Achievement Data, Annual Report, 1998. Used by permission.



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> Scores don't have to be used to play "gotcha." Instead, they can be used to enable people to take pride in their progress and accomplishments.

## Results-Driven Leadership

### Expectations and Outcomes

A few years ago, I heard Jim Kieffer say, "Expectations are the single most powerful factor that affects student achievement." More recently, he described to me one academic department's experience of significantly increasing the requirements on an end-of-course assessment—only to see themselves and their students more than rise to the challenge. "It's all about expectations," he said. It is *not*, as he says, about

> what we think kids *can* do. It's about designing curriculum around what they *should* do. We can't say, "Ninth graders can't do this stuff. They watch too much TV, 8th grade didn't prepare them." ... Its better to require a fifth year of high school than to lower standards and expectations.

This is the radical ethos that these districts have embraced. As Kieffer puts it, we must go from "coverage of materials" to "kids learning outcomes." Kieffer advised the audience not to start with a structure or process—like a new school schedule—but to begin with "curriculum and assessment," because "*assessment affects curriculum*" (my emphasis). As Stephen Covey (1991) puts it, "Begin with the end in mind" (p. 95).

In this sense, most of this chapter has been about leadership. Its chief component is its uncompromising insistence, from the top, on commonly defined, measurable outcomes, and on monitoring and promoting progress toward these outcomes with data.

But, as is almost too obvious, the leaders couldn't have done this by themselves. As Linda Lambert (1998) has told us, true leadership—sustained leadership—all but has to be *shared leadership*.

### Shared Leadership in Glendale Union

We've already seen how Glendale teachers have crafted, created, and refined the excellent assessments, lessons, units, and instructional materials that are the real genius and substance of this system. We've seen how the leadership of teacher-coordinators and teacher-mentors, through a system of compensation, shared responsibility, and release time, has been so crucial to Glendale Union's success.

Leadership, it might be said, captures and organizes this genius. For Kieffer, this happens when leadership "comes from both ends":

> Some will say that change should be teacher driven. I think it's a combination.... I like to say it should be both teacher-driven and principal-dragged [he laughs]. If we're not behind it, it won't work. By "dragged" I mean we have to be pushing it.

Practically speaking, how does such "pushing" get done?

### Ownership: When "Not Everyone Agrees on Much of Anything"

One of the most frequently asked questions consultants hear is a variation on this theme: How can we promote buy-in, overcome resistance, and move ahead when there are (inevitably) those who don't or won't cooperate? Kieffer's advice on this topic is practical and inspiring:

> Not everyone agrees on much of anything So people have to feel access to decisions That means access to information, involvement and influence—like a Venn diagram with "ownership" in the center. If they don't feel access to the decisions, they're less likely to own it and for the innovation to be successful. And if they don't feel some influence, ownership is less likely.

I especially like what he says about access to information, how buy-in and ownership are advanced when we

> *provide examples of other places, other parts of the country where something has worked* (my emphasis).

Kieffer tells the story of one of his coordinators who, during her first year in that position, got excited about an innovation. But the teachers weren't as keen on it. "Just tell us what to do," they said.

> This teacher—well, she's practically crying. so we talked. I asked her, "What's the difference between them and you?" She said, "I've done all this reading, and they've been teaching." So she gathered all this material—and, by golly, she had them read it and report back. Then she called them up. They were all excited about it! She then began to involve them in the process, *conceptually*, and she included them in discussions. She was going to San Francisco to attend a conference [to learn about the innovation]. She asked me, "How many can I take?" I said, "2." She said, "But I want 9." We sent 13. . . . People who have access to information and are involved, tend to have more ownership.

But what of those vestiges of—sometimes irrational—resistance? It is important to remember that the leader's job is to "drag"—to push and persuade and assemble evidence to build a critical mass, a sufficient majority who can carry the ball while the rest catch up. For Kieffer; that means working diligently until you can involve "67 percent of your staff." If you can convince two-thirds of your faculty to try an innovation, then "the innovation has a good chance of being successful."

Another smart move: Support and then follow the path made by your most positive and willing people. Kieffer informed me that Glendale's performance-based assessment, with its emphasis on writing, began in the language arts department, where writing has a natural home. It moved from there into other areas, as other departments began to see and hear, up close, about such assessments and their benefits. With time, it evolved into every core area—and then into every single course, including electives, foreign language, and, most recently, physical education.

There are powerful lessons here: First, pick the "low-hanging fruit"—then involve and advance inexorably, if slowly, referring along the way to *evidence of success* and refinement that help you to buttress your case for the innovation. And provide access to the information, involvement, and influence that people need to feel good about new practices.

Thus, for nearly 15 years, has Glendale Union High School District managed to develop and sustain the momentum that has made them as equitable, mature, and imaginative a performance-based system as any to be found. From physics to physical education, regardless of the vicissitudes of what students learned or didn't learn before high school, they are the recipients of Glendale's high-quality instruction and assessment. They are the beneficiaries of the excellent education provided by Glendale's inventive and ever-improving teaching faculty.

> ➤ *For more information, contact Vern Jacobs, Associate Superintendent, 7650 N. 43rd Ave., Glendale, AZ 85301; phone: 623-435-6003.*

## Epilogue: Replication

Several years ago, while working as a central office administrator, I brought a team of administrators and department heads from Lake Havasu City, Arizona, to hear a presentation about Glendale Union's system. It was given by Superintendent Jim Kieffer and his staff.
The presentation had a decisive effect on our K–12 district, beginning with the high school. With the leadership and support of high school Principal Pat Rooney, the department heads began to build this new system. The leadership and advocacy of Joyce Hollis, who was then the English department chair, was especially instrumental in seeing the innovation through. Here is her account of Glendale's influence on Lake Havasu schools:

When we came back from Glendale's presentation, we saw the value it had. We began to develop rubrics for English department use. Within a year, we went from using generic rubrics to having one for every grade level, 9 through 12. We then refined these rubrics—we now have one for a persuasive paper, one for compare and contrast—a different rubric for each kind of paper, like Glendale's system. We didn't do exactly what they did, but used their work as a model which could then be translated into our own model. The ironic thing is that when we were done, our system turned out to be very similar to theirs; we use much the same approach.

One of our major goals as we prepared for North Central evaluation was to have measurable end-of-course results for every course in every department and to have rubric results for writing at the end of 1st, 2nd and 3rd quarter. Because we developed this system, the principal can now get the results on his desk in a timely manner and can report them to the school board.

There was no more guessing; as department heads, the end-of-course assessments helped ensure that teachers were on the same page, to get where we should be going instead of showing videos. There was a little grumbling at first, but now the system is in place.

Without Glendale, we wouldn't have had data beyond our grade books. Because we went there, its incredible: We now have results, even breakdowns of skills in almost every subject area.

—JOYCE HOLLIS

Fast forward: Within a year and a half, Lake Havasu faculties had willingly and enthusiastically created common end-of-course assessments for virtually every course taught. In K–8 math and most K–12 English classes, teachers also had created periodic assessments (every quarter or every semester) that they could discuss and analyze for improvement purposes.

This process began with a vision to replicate not the tests themselves, but the essential features of another district's success. It included access, information, and involvement for teachers whose willingness was essential to its success. It led to what most of the teachers involved believed to be a better and more coherent assessment system for Lake Havasu schools.

# Vignettes 9 and 10

## Vignette 9

Carol Jago, Lynda Peddy, and Cecil Morris are founding members of the California Reading and Literature Project (CRLP) "Reading Results" Program for which Lynda Peddy is director. The program emphasizes measurable reading improvement goals; frequent, focused teacher collaboration; and ongoing use of data to guide and adjust instruction. It has been rewarding to have been involved in this excellent program in the early stages and to watch it gain momentum and immense statewide visibility in California.

Carol Jago, Lynda Peddy, and Cecil Morris report:

CRLP heard Mike Schmoker's call for "results" and decided to use his book of that name (Schmoker, 1996) as a model to improve the teaching of reading. After several successful pilot efforts at schools in Sacramento, Redding, San Diego, Turlock, and Los Angeles, we refined the model into a full-blown training program.

Lynda Peddy, the director of the CRLP's preK–3 Reading Results program, envisioned the program while a teacher-leader for CRLP and a reading specialist at James McKee Elementary School, Elk Grove, California. Using the CRLP's teacher leadership network, Peddy recruited 26 other K–3 classroom teachers and reading specialists to work with her to design a model that used assessment, instruction, and teamwork. The goal of the program included giving classroom teachers the power to improve student reading achievement. Since its beginning in 1996, it grew from a fledgling group of about 65 teachers to over 6,000 today.

The program was impressive enough to draw the attention and financial support of California Governor Gray Davis, for whom the CRLP Results project has become one of the primary providers of staff development designed to improve early reading instruction.

In the past 4 years, more than 6,000 teachers have participated in the CRLP Reading Results Program. Teachers attend an intensive 40-hour, one-week summer institute, where they learn how to use assessment data, goal-setting, and teamwork to get maximum value from their instructional materials. After the summer institute, teachers attend another 40 hours of academic year study and continue to meet in grade-level teams to examine student data and plan effective instruction for their students.

CRLP's Reading Results started as a grassroots effort and has been a teacher-designed, teacher-led program from the beginning. In consultation with university

professors, respected researchers, and school district leadership, preK–3 teacher leaders continually revise and shape the program to meet the needs of California schools. Participants in the Reading Results Program take responsibility for the learning of their students by looking at assessment data, improving their own skills, and working in teams who have high expectations for themselves and their students.

Still in its early stages—and adjusting to tremendous growth—the program has already helped a host of schools to realize dramatic gains in students' reading achievement. At schools like McKee, Mistletoe, and Lincoln Acres Elementary, intensive intervention, designed as a result of regular testing and teamwork, is helping more children make the grade. Higher percentages of students are solidly on grade level in reading than before the Reading Results Program. For example, in 1996–97, fewer than 50 percent of the 1st grade students at McKee were on grade level in reading comprehension. By 1998–99, over 80 percent of the 1st grade students were on grade level in reading comprehension. Improvement continued: In 1999–2000, McKee was chosen as a California Distinguished School by the California Department of Education. Carol Sacre, McKee's principal, attributes this improvement in student scores to the effects of the Results program. Lincoln Acres, in National School District, the 13th poorest school district in the United States, showed such strong gains in reading achievement that the district superintendent made certain that all district elementary schools had the opportunity to participate in CRLP's Reading Results Program.

Theories about how children learn are delightful to ponder, but unless they are aimed toward and tested against concrete results, they are unlikely to make a bit of difference for children. The California Reading and Literature Project believes that schools can provide a better education for all students by focusing unwaveringly on better results and the conditions that promote them. Mike Schmoker's book *Results* has been the cornerstone of our work.

➤ *For more information, contact Carol Jago, Lynda Peddy, and Cecil Morris at California Reading and Literature Project (CRLP), 223 Foley Hall, CSU-Sacramento, 6000 "J" St., Sacramento, CA 95819; phone: 916-278-5876.*

# Vignette 10

Celeste Hyland is principal at Peck Elementary School in the Jefferson County Public Schools near Denver, Colorado, where Jeanine Rodriguez and Angela Herbers are teachers. I worked with faculties of three "Jeffco" schools during the 1998–99 school year. Because of initial skepticism about these processes, which is not unusual, some teams set extremely conservative goals. Despite the fact that the early efforts were somewhat uneven, all teams at the three schools met or exceeded their achievement goals. The results at Peck provide evidence that even a somewhat uneven effort produces strong results—even in its first year.

Celeste Hyland reports:

During the 1998–99 school year, Mike Schmoker came to Peck several times to work with the entire staff and with grade-level teams. We focused on the collection and evaluation of data and on the plan for a team model.

First, we wanted to ensure that we had measurable goals linked to assessments. We used the data from the previous year's assessments to set new improvement goals for the 1999 school year. We reviewed data and set goals on the basis of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the Colorado State Assessment Program (CSAP). Because these procedures were new for us, most of the teams set fairly conservative, measurable goals.

We also reviewed progress four times during the year by administering our own formative assessments in reading, writing, and math. We reviewed the results from these quarterly assessments and brainstormed for strategies to improve the weaker areas.

Initially, one of the most difficult obstacles we faced was convincing teachers *to see the importance of student test results* and to use this information to drive their instruction. Teachers needed to learn to constantly ask themselves: "What's working? What's not working? Why? How do we move forward?"

Another obstacle was the traditional tendency for teachers to become comfortable in their isolation. They can get caught up in the daily business of teaching and fail to understand the importance and value of a colleague's shared information.

Our school addressed these obstacles by refocusing staff meetings on instructional issues and on sharing data. We also cover miscellaneous items in the weekly bulletin and by voicemail.

Everyone on our staff deserves real credit for our improvements. At the same time, certain people can be catalysts. Early on, our 2nd grade team saw how important it was to be instructionally consistent throughout the grades and to have ongoing, schoolwide dialogue. In one extended session, their pioneering efforts

helped to guide the K–3 grade-level reading teams as they restructured the reading program, based on proven practices like strategic grouping and increased silent reading time.

As a result of these processes, we realized some significant gains on the ITBS in reading and math (see the following table).

**Percentage of Students Above the 50th Percentile on the ITBS**

| | *1998* | *1999* | *Gain* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Grade 3 | | | |
| Reading | 39% | 47% | +8 |
| Math | 39% | 49% | +10 |
| Grade 4 | | | |
| Reading | 62% | 69% | +7 |
| Math | 58% | 75% | +17 |

In addition, between 1998 and 2000, the percentage of students in the Advanced/Proficient Categories in Reading on the 3rd grade CSAP rose from 66 to 77 percent. With these recent gains, our 3rd grade reading scores are now the highest among the nine elementary schools in our town of Arvada.

➤ *For more information, contact Celeste Hyland, Principal, and Angela Herbers and Jeanine Rodriguez, Teachers, Peck Elementary School, 6495 Carr St., Arvada, CO 80004; phone: 303-982-0590.*

# 5 Brazosport Independent School District: Erasing the Achievement Gap

> One of education's best kept secrets is that kids learn what we teach them.
>
> —Larry Lezotte

In terms of sheer numbers, of demonstrating a school system's ability to eradicate demographic disparities, we may have saved the best for last. In the Brazosport Independent School District, they haven't *reduced* the gap between low- and high-achieving subgroups—they have *annihilated* it.

Brazosport Independent School District is a K–12 district with about 14,000 students. It straddles several municipalities in an area about 40 miles south of Houston, Texas. Districtwide, 43 percent of its families live below the poverty line. The respective proportion of economically disadvantaged students at these schools runs from as low as 7 percent at some schools to as high as 85 percent at others. Historically, an enormous achievement gap has existed between the poorer communities—like Freeport to the North—and more affluent communities like Lake Jackson in the southern portion of the district.

In 1992, the district was embarrassed to discover that half its schools were labeled "accredited/warned" by the Texas State Board of Education. A parent group from low-achieving Freeport showed up one night at a board meeting to greet the new superintendent, Gerald Anderson, with a modest proposal: Switch principals and faculties with Lake Jackson, where the affluent schools are located. That way, they said, "We'll get the same high results as they do."

It is a credit to Anderson that, rather than dismiss this challenge, he turned to Patricia Davenport, who was then director of instruction, to see if they couldn't find a way to make a real difference. My guess is that neither of them anticipated the headline-making improvements that would occur in the next few years. Together, and with a host of great ideas generated and refined by teacher teams, they wrought what is another modern-day testament to the cumulative power of ideas.

## Fast Forward: "Breakthrough Improvements"

Their system worked mightily. And *quickly*. As so many schools have learned, educators can—and *should*—engineer serious improvement efforts to have an immediate effect (Schmoker, 1996). Within a school year, one teacher's influence enabled her entire school to turn around; within two years, they had significantly raised achievement in all of the district's lowest-performing schools. Within five years, Brazosport was the highest-achieving school district in Texas: *Every one of the district's 18 schools* earned "exemplary" status—meaning that 90 percent or more of every subgroup—white, black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged—had achieved mastery on the state achievement test in reading, writing, and mathematics. For these and other accomplishments, they became the first Texas school district to win the Texas Quality Award for performance excellence.

Not to mention that 93 percent of special education kids now reach these same standards in reading, writing, and math—a percentage higher than the *general* population for most *affluent* schools in Texas. Or that at one point, the high school with the highest percentage of economically disadvantaged students and the lowest writing scores in the district was able not only to meet, but to surpass the performance of the district's most affluent high school.

To get a vivid sense of how dramatic their improvement was, look at Figures 5.1–5.4. All ending data points are in the 90- to 100-percent range. In addition, they have reduced disciplinary referrals by about 30 percent over the years and all but eliminated dropouts. Davenport is emphatic that

> we won't let kids drop out. We tell them, "No you're not!" We have to be very assertive. Before they drop out, they have to meet with the counselor. We find a way. They might get a GED [General Education Diploma] or attend an alternative school. We have almost no dropouts. Its about 1.1 percent.

But perhaps the most interesting and ironic twist in this story is that some people from Lake Jackson—the affluent community—now "haul their kids to Freeport." Says Davenport: "It has saved the town. The *bloods* compete with the *crips* for the highest scores and there is no more gang activity."

*Once again, the operative question for us as we study these districts should be: Can the general structures and strategies of this system be replicated?*

## A Simple Plan

My interest in this district began, as with Oak Park, while reading an article by Joan Richardson, director of publications for the National Staff Development Council (NSDC). For her, Brazosport's

> road map to success could be used by any district. Its story demonstrates the power of having teachers closely examine student work, using data to guide decisions about staff learning and student instruction and the value of having teachers work together continually to tackle shared problems (Richardson, 1998, p. 1).

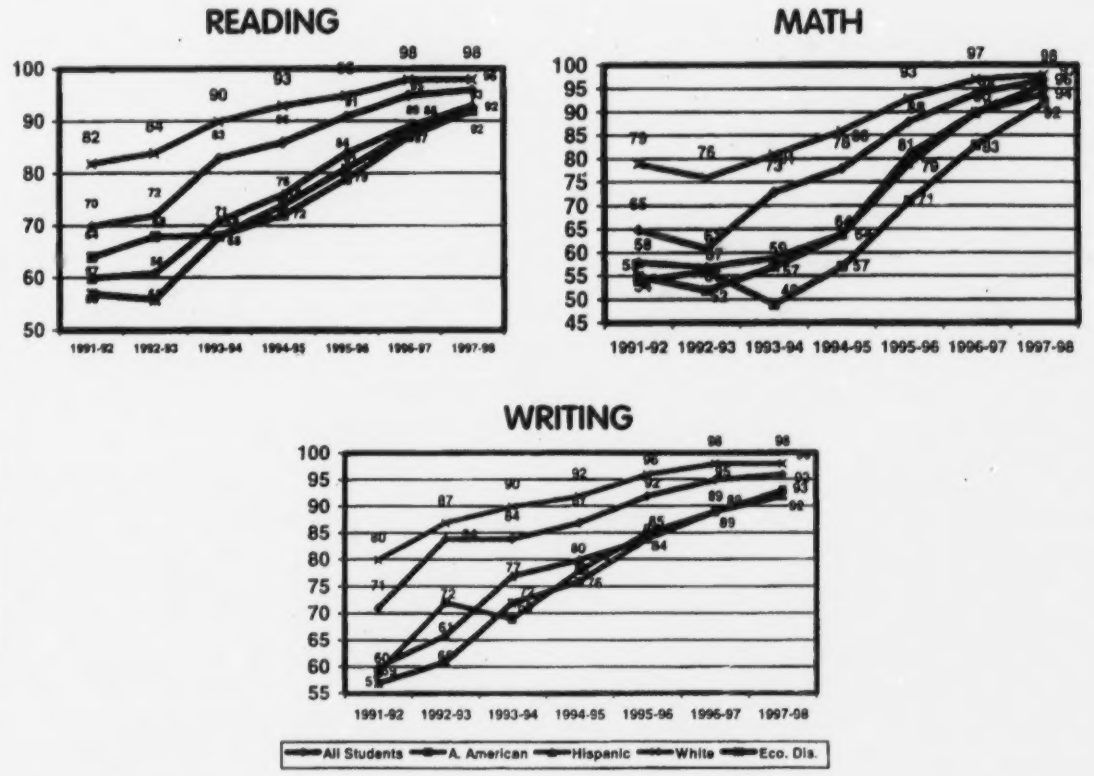
Here, again, we see these same simple elements: the power of teachers working in teams to reach learning goals using data as their guide—as good a beginning as can be found for those serious about improvement.

The Brazosport system is perhaps the most detailed and prescriptive of those we study here. It reflects the accumulated abundance of local teacher expertise and input. But even within the district, educators implement the system with some flexibility. As with all of these systems, we needn't copy every detail, lockstep, to succeed. These systems are rife with opportunities for flexible, intelligent adaptation.

## An Encounter with Accountability

Davenport recalls how Texas's experiment with accountability also played a pivotal role, of

FIGURES 5.1–5.3 READING, MATH, AND WRITING ACHIEVEMENT




*Source:* Brazosport Independent School District. Used by permission.

how their state test, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) initially "didn't have any effect whatsoever. It just went into files and everyone ignored the results, until there was accountability, until they started to put schools on probation and publish results in newspapers."

Some people might wince at such pronouncements. But wherever we land on this issue, we have to reckon with the rapidly growing body of evidence that accountability promotes higher achievement. In whole states—like Texas, North Carolina and Michigan—and in innumerable schools and districts, accountability has pushed up achievement. I'm reminded of a conversation I once had with the eminent author and researcher Michael Fullan in Toronto. He was emphatic in pointing out that wherever he has seen genuine school improvement, the impetus for the improvement is virtually always an external or state test.

On this always-ticklish issue of accountability, this provocative statement is attributed to writer Stephen Covey:

> Accountability follows responsibility. If there is no accountability, little by little, people lose their sense of responsibility and start blaming circumstances or others for their poor performance.

FIGURE 5.4 ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED (E.D.) (LEAST TO GREATEST)

**READING**

| | % E.D. | E.D. % PASSING | All Students % PASSING |
|---|---|---|---|
| BEUTEL | 7.4 | 100 | 100 |
| BRANNEN | 11.3 | 92.9 | 99.3 |
| ROBERTS | 17.1 | 95.7 | 95.6 |
| NEY | 23.9 | 94.1 | 98.3 |
| POLK | 29.4 | 96.5 | 98.0 |
| AUSTIN | 32.1 | 100 | 100 |

*Source:* Brazosport Independent School District. Used by permission.

It is time we reconsider tired, often unexamined notions of accountability—and our knee-jerk propensity to vilify it, rather than take on the challenge it presents. Accountability made a difference—a huge difference—for Brazosport's economically disadvantaged kids. A sensible accountability is the price of improvement.

## Exceptional Alignment: The TAAS and Common Standards

Rosenholtz (1991) points out that one of the chief failings of school systems is the bewildering array of options teachers have for teaching, and the haphazardness this creates. Teachers pick and choose from among these options to teach an increasingly idiosyncratic versus common set of learning objectives and skills—even though common standards are essential to clear communication, coherence, and alignment among instructional effort, resources, and programs (see pp. 17–18).

Not least among the advantages of Texas's state assessment system is its clear, common standards. Texas teachers don't have to guess about what to teach or about what their children will be tested on. Unlike many states, where there is a patent mismatch between state tests and their standards documents (Schmoker & Marzano, 1999), Texas state standards and the tests that accompany them are one and the same. These common standards ensure against the drift and confusion that are inevitable in their absence. They create the basis for focused, collective effort and dialogue.

But though common standards were an important basis for Brazosport's improvement, they were not the engine for change. Its genius and the best part of this story is the system that principals and teachers devised and refined over time. It gave them an exceptional degree of instructional alignment that runs from:

- Explicit, assessed standards to
- The taught curriculum to
- Assessment aligned to the curriculum to
- Effective, curriculum-based teaching materials to
- Staff development linked to the standards to
- Remedial programs which target the most difficult assessed standards to
- Schedules and structures that manifestly promote success on assessments.

*Everything* is aimed right at the goal of helping all kids master the TAAS learning goals. This was the result of years of ongoing *collaboration* and—just as important—a new *attitude* about what Brazosport staff believed they could accomplish for kids if they worked and learned together.

## Teamwork in Brazosport

> I was in Freeport for 30 years, but I still had something to learn.
>
> —PATRICIA DAVENPORT

Collective, aligned learning doesn't occur in a vacuum. As Judith Little (1990) found, effective teamwork transcends personal relationships. It occurs when we keep our "eyes on the prize" of higher student learning.

**A New Attitude and the Importance of Humility**

It's been said that "attitude is everything." Fullan and Hargreaves found that collaboration leads to gains in achievement only when teachers embrace the attitude that they can get improved results—but can only do so with the help of their colleagues (1996, pp. 44–46).

Effective collaboration itself requires a certain humility. This can't be presumed. Institutionally, Brazosport's willingness to learn overcame a natural tendency for us to be defensive about student failure, to rest in the easy self-assurance that we already work hard and are doing our best. But lessons abound that effort and commitment, by themselves, aren't enough. The late W. Edwards Deming, whose international influence on industry was prodigious, wrote that it is "fairly easy for an organization to go downhill, even though everyone in the organization performs with devotion" (1986, p. 26).

In an organization, "best," rightly defined, can be achieved only through collective, not merely individual, effort and intelligence. That requires a willingness to learn. "Seven years ago," says Davenport,

> we made the painful admission that we weren't doing well enough with poor kids. . . . The first step to improvement is taking responsibility for improvement. The old paradigm was, "I taught it, but they didn't get it." The new paradigm is, "Maybe I didn't teach it the right way." The question isn't, "Did we deliver it?" but "Show me what you did." Everyone's building on each others' success; . . . none of this competitive business. We don't do that anymore. It's, "What did we do well? What not so well? How can we work together to do it differently?"

Improvement began with a willingness to identify and then tap into the expertise at their doorstep. Now the name of the game was to organize, disseminate, and refine it.

Part of this new attitude is honestly confronting, even committing to the notion that students with whom we have historically not succeeded can meet challenging standards. Students don't always believe this; we have to believe *for* them. As Gerald Anderson told me, improvement began when they institutionally adopted the belief that

> all children can learn. Excuses for low academic performance based on socioeconomic or racial differences are unacceptable.

Once we cross this bridge, we are ready to collaborate. Some cross it at the beginning; others catch up. But leadership's visible commitment to these new notions, accompanied by new structures, can help others in the system to turn the corner on these important attitudes.

**An Expectation of Interaction—from the Top**

One of the first things that Anderson insisted on was focused, instructional collaboration. Davenport was impressed with this:

> The requirement from Anderson was that principals must allow for common planning times at least twice a month by grade level and subject-area team. That was the minimum requirement . . . it was more difficult to achieve at the high school level.

Of course it was, as anyone with high school experience knows. As one principal told me, it wasn't easy to meet Anderson's requirement. But Anderson supported it with action. Because (as the Adlai Stevenson High School District found) mornings are a better time for high school teachers to meet, Anderson said, "You can go home early if you come in early."

This, too, distinguishes the best educational leaders. They focus on what's most important and then monitor implementation so that they can offer assistance or creative accommodations to help overcome obstacles. Anderson knew that collaboration was absolutely essential to the improvement scheme. So he swiftly and decisively found a solution to the chaotic after-school realities of high school schedules. His understanding of the centrality of teamwork is clearly bone-deep:

> It's sad that schools in this state and nation typically don't allow time for teachers to meet and collaborate about how to improve student achievement. . . . Our teachers meet on average every two weeks, some more frequently than that. The important thing is that when teachers meet and collaborate, they focus in on a particular objective that students aren't meeting. Our Quality agenda [i.e. "Total Quality," which has had such an influence in Brazosport] taught us that this is how you change the system, how you get "outside of the box."

Davenport, given the charge of getting teaming off the ground, started small—with math teachers. As Davenport says, they began to talk about instructional improvements

> over coffee and donuts. Every improvement—and there have been a lot—has come from the classroom teacher . . . by giving them time to get together and talk. That wasn't the case before.

This was the beginning of making focused, instructionally substantive collaboration the norm in Brazosport. There was no stopping them now.

**Instructionally Specific Sharing**

Testing coordinator Becky Reinhart, until recently an English teacher at Brazoswood High School, said, "Teachers began to gather materials and share ideas to address areas of weakness. We beg, borrow, and steal each other's ideas all the time."

Herb Mays, an assistant principal at Brazoswood, talks about both the difficulty of achieving this at the high school level, as well as the difference it has made in courses like algebra.

> It took a great deal of maneuvering of the master schedule, but now teachers discuss curriculum and instruction throughout the school year during common planning periods. Teachers of the same course get together and they meet during school hours. . . . As a result, Algebra I scores have risen significantly. Teachers are now using the same lessons and assessments.

Susan Hinkle, TAAS coordinator, tells me that she gets around to almost all the schools. "We meet all the time," she says. "Our teachers are off together by grade level team. . . . We plan math, reading, and writing together as grade-level teams. We're always learning things from each other." She then remarks on the obvious effect this teamwork has had on new teachers:

> This really helps our new and our veteran teachers. We're always hearing "Here's how I took one of our lessons and modified it." I've seen a new teacher who was nervous and timid. . . . I don't think she would have been as successful as she turned out to be without the support. But she learned strategies from others and turned out to be a great teacher.

Teachers share ideas, lessons, strategies, and whole instructional units. Jean Bailey, Math Department Chair at Brazosport High School, told me, "All algebra teachers plan the units for the next 6 weeks, and then we give an end-of-unit algebra test. . . . We had to get everyone to do the same things and give the same tests." This, too, was a challenge; but now, Bailey said, they "give the same tests and revise them each year."

**The Tools of Teamwork: The Instructional Teaming Log/Guidelines**

The use of disarmingly simple tools can be the difference between unfocused and highly

productive teams. One of my most satisfying professional experiences is seeing teachers realize how fast and effectively they can generate powerful solutions and strategies using brainstorming guidelines and team learning logs (see Appendixes C and D, respectively).

Brazosport uses a similar set of guidelines and a "Teaming Log." The guidelines include a repetitive emphasis on the fact that teaming is intended for the *single, clear purpose of increasing student achievement,* that analysis of test scores must serve this same sole purpose and that participation must be regular—once a week—and "student and instruction centered." Like the "Brainstorming Guidelines" in Appendix C, there is an expectation that *all* must participate and help refine lessons and strategies for better results.

The "Instructional Teaming Log" includes space for instructional topics addressed and for recommended changes to instruction (see Appendix D for a similar log). The value of such a log can hardly be gainsaid. For one thing, we mustn't underestimate the value of recording good ideas and of keeping a *paper trail* of proven strategies that can be shared with other teams and schools now and in the future. Once again, these comprise the instructional and intellectual "harvest" advocated in each of these chapters (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999).

For the average team, these tools are essential—especially in the early going. As a workshop participant once said to me, "Productive teamwork is an unnatural activity." Precisely. We "naturally" like to talk at length, to meander or even get sidetracked (I sure do). Rosenholtz (1991) found that teachers' natural tendency is to avoid productive academic talk or to dwell on reasons why students can't achieve—versus how they can (pp. 37–39).

At the same time, we must encourage the natural interest teachers have in productive collaboration once we acquire—as the districts in these chapters have acquired—the discipline of focused, instructionally productive dialogue.

Brazosport's organized, aligned collaboration has paid off in every realm. Consider only a few of the strategies and ideas that made a difference for Brazosport students. All these strategies came from teachers and began to spread to other teachers:

- They *expanded* the traditional reading period—or had students attend not one, but two reading courses if needed.
- The "Fraction of the week" and the "Writing rule of the week" are posted on the instructional calendar and reviewed and reinforced by teachers throughout the school.
- Students are asked, as they read, to briefly write the main idea for each paragraph in a blank next to each paragraph in a passage, then to use these to help determine the main idea for the piece as a whole. This promotes concentration.
- Kids read to each other.
- Students "whisper-read" to themselves because, as one teacher told me, "The ears often pick up what the eyes miss."
- Students read a passage *three times*: the first time to skim, the next time slowly— paragraph by paragraph—and the third time reading to synthesize or capture the main idea.
- Students learn rap songs to learn writing rules.
- Students use and refer to an attached "pencil card" containing rules for writing and conventions.
- Students have benefited from one team's ingenious formula for writing an effective descriptive paper.

But, as Davenport emphasizes, even the larger, structural changes came from teachers--including the Eight-Step process (described in the next section) that is at the heart of their success. And though their improvement was almost immediate, Reading Department Chair Charles Horsley pointed out to me (and in the same language as Milwaukee's Mary Lamping), "There was no silver

bullet. . . . The Eight-Step Process was the product of eight years of fine tuning."

## The Eight-Step Process

### Start with the Data: The Influence of One Teacher

Davenport took the same propitious first step as did all of the systems described in this book: She began with data. And it was data that led her to the teacher expertise that set the pattern for improvement. Faculty expertise was the bricks and mortar of the Eight-Step Process. After receiving the TAAS scores, she broke them out by school and—significantly—by classroom teacher. She made the same profound discovery made by Oak Park: that *certain teachers within your own district are perhaps your best source of improvement strategies*—or even whole systems.

Teacher Mary Barksdale turned out to be a gold mine. Davenport gives much-deserved credit to Barksdale, 94 percent of whose 3rd grade students were economically disadvantaged and 73 percent of whom were minorities. A light went on when Davenport noticed that 100 percent of Barksdale's kids achieved mastery in every section of the TAAS.

Davenport had the good sense to closely study Barksdale's process and then to ask her to teach her process to colleagues. It is a credit to Brazosport teachers that in Richardson's words, they "were delighted to learn about her process" (1998, p. 6).

Indeed, asking teachers to learn from each other raises the specter of professional jealousy. No teacher, for arbitrary reasons, wants to abandon her current practices to adopt someone else's. But we fail to realize that it is the rare teacher who will scoff at another teacher's methods if we respectfully and impartially provide *clear evidence* of her patently superior results.

It might be pointed out that the expectation for change was highest for the low-achieving schools. As several staff informed me, teachers at already high-achieving schools had more freedom to adapt the Eight-Step Process. Clear, urgent need has its imperatives. In settings where kids are failing miserably, it is cruel—a form of malpractice really—to ignore successful methods to be found right within our own schools and districts.

Barksdale achieved her immense success through a system of continuous assessment and reteaching for students not up to mastery.

### TQM in Brazosport

A system was born. It began with Barksdale's solid, commonsense practices and was formalized through TQM or "Total Quality Management" principles (based on the teachings of W. Edwards Deming). Barksdale's continuous assessment and reteaching system became the "Eight-Step Process." It was coupled with Deming's "Plan, Do, Check, Act" cycle. Brazosport's adaptation of it is built around the need to begin planning on the basis of performance data (Plan); to then teach on the basis of that analysis (Do); to then assess the results of our teaching (Check); and on that basis to make adjustments to instructional practice to then get even better results (Act).

Almost any successful system—including a school system—is characterized by these activities. Nonetheless, their simple, compelling logic continues to elude most school systems. The Total Quality Management movement itself, once a high-profile reform, came and left the stage in a relative hurry. Its near-demise was hastened by those who never realized that it was about more than its trappings: elaborate processes, jargon, business partnerships, or improvement tools. The record is clear that "Total Quality" only works in settings where there was an uncompromising obsession with both short and long-term results (Brigham, 1994; Walton, 1986)—in settings, that is, like Brazosport.

**The 8-Step Process**

1. Test Score Disaggregation—Plan
2. Time Line Development—Plan
3. Instructional Focus—Do
4. Assessment—Check
5. Tutorials—Act
6. Enrichment—Act
7. Maintenance—Check
8. Monitoring—Check

**Eight Steps to Success**

Brazosport gives us an instructive example of what can happen when results, not mere processes, are made paramount in the implementation of Quality principles—even *and especially* in the short term.

Perhaps the best way to learn from Brazosport is by walking through their eight-step process (for a summary, see box).

**Step1. Test Score Disaggregation ("PLAN").** Again, as we see in all of the districts treated here, improvement begins with reality—the data that tell us where we are relative to where we need to be.

First, all teachers receive their TAAS data from reports generated by the state and central office. They review these accessible reports on their own previous year's performance, as well as reports on incoming students.

Then, by grade level or subject area team, they examine the strengths and weaknesses revealed by the numbers. Their focus is on the number of students who are or aren't passing—attaining the state standard—in reading, writing, and math, as well as the respective subskills within each of these areas. New teacher induction includes training in these straightforward data analysis procedures.

Finally, teachers do something starkly simple but effective: They establish crucial priorities by manually rank-ordering the subskills from weakest to strongest on a form like the one in Figure 5.5. For years, schools I have worked with have found this simple exercise to be enormously important for improvement planning (see Appendix B). It constitutes the second essential piece of effective goal-setting. The Brazosport rank-ordering forms are typical of others I've seen, as Figure 5.5 shows.

FIGURE 5.5 RANK-ORDERING FORM: PERCENT OF STUDENTS AT/ABOVE

*Math and Subskills*

| | |
|---|---|
| 64% | Math |
| 33% | Geometrical Concepts |
| 42% | Measurement |
| 49% | Statistics and Probability |
| 58% | Number Sense |

*Source:* Brazosport Independent School District. Used by permission.

There is an important relationship between the eye, the head, and the hand. We have a better chance of remembering what we write and organize, by hand, on paper. One of the mystifying realities in this age of accountability is that for all our talk about data and goals, it is the rare teacher who, when asked, knows her team's measurable goal for that year—to the number. Even fewer know the specific, assessed areas where student needs are most pronounced. The simple paper exercise in Figure 5.5 helps to solve this problem. (The form in Appendix B serves a similar function).

This awareness, based on data analysis, is an essential beginning. But it is only a beginning.

**Step 2: Time Line Development ("PLAN").** The Brazosport teachers then do something equally compelling: They create a schedule

for instruction and assessment by team, on a calendar (see Figure 5.6). They begin, logically, with those areas that their analysis in Step 1 tells them are their greatest opportunities for improvement—those specific areas where the greatest number of students needs help, and which have the greatest "weight" on the assessment. By starting with these areas, they ensure that these will receive a greater share of instructional emphasis and review (more about "review" in Step 7).

This common schedule establishes the conditions for true teamwork: Teachers can know that during about the same time period, their grade-level colleagues are grappling with some of the same curriculum, the same instructional challenges. This creates the common ground essential to intelligible collaboration and that lends timeliness and immediacy to instructional dialogue.

The calendar also allows teachers in other disciplines to join in the effort. Because the standards are clear and the weekly objectives are posted, teachers from any department can reinforce that week's objective, knowing that they are truly assisting in the school's academic mission. For instance, teachers throughout the school can see that the calendar contains a "Fraction of the Week" for math—actually, an equivalent fraction, percentage, and decimal that will receive brief attention and review, such as "1/4; .25; 25 percent." Teachers in any area can find ways to teach or reinforce the practical use and application of such figures.

In reading, there is an "Irregular Word of the Week," for example, "aunt" or "column" or "beauty." Because the words are posted on the schedule, even physical education teachers and coaches have gotten into the act. When "fact" and "opinion" were the emphases of the week, one coach wouldn't let his players shower until each could give him three facts and three opinions. Another coach would post the fraction of the week (if you'll pardon the indelicacy) above the urinals.

There are also common times scheduled for assessment and review, all clearly and explicitly posted to powerfully reinforce Brazosport's exceptionally common, deliberate spirit and instructional focus.

This, too, is alignment: *a powerful, symbolic, multilayered reinforcement of learning objectives and their importance.*

**Step 3: Instructional Focus ("DO").** Having analyzed data, listed priorities, and established an instructional schedule, the next step is instruction itself. The topics and objectives scheduled in Step 2 are fleshed out and supported in Step 3, the "Instructional Focus" as Brazosport calls it. We go from "Plan"—the timeline of Step 2—to "Do" in Step 3: the actual delivery of instruction.

"Instructional Focus" defines and provides the substance, methods, and materials of instruction that are scheduled in Step 2. Their explicit aim is to avoid leaving alignment, improvement, and quality instruction to chance.

The time devoted to the "Instructional Focus" varies. In the early grades, only about 10 minutes is typical; at the upper grades, as much as the entire period might be devoted to that objective. Again, the teams themselves, as several teachers told me, are the architects of these schedules, just as they are the architects of the system itself. In many cases, the objectives are taught during the first part of the period, making it easier for principals to observe and evaluate instruction; the schedule enables them to know exactly what objective is being taught and when. This is essential to the success of Step 8 (administrative "Monitoring").

In addition, for each identified area of weakness or "Objective" on the calendar, the district organizes and provides detailed information and materials that expedite effective teaching in the target areas. Notice in Figure 5.7, how the following "Instructional Focus" form explicates the specific breakdowns of skills within the general

FIGURE 5.6 INSTRUCTIONAL CALENDAR

| S | M | T | W | T | F | S |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | 1 | 2 |
| | | MATH FOCUS: Objective 1 - Number Concepts<br>Integrate Objectives 6 - 13 | | | | |
| 3 | 4<br>Labor Day<br>No Classes | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| | | MATH FOCUS: Objective 1 - Number Concepts<br>Integrate Objectives 6 - 13 | | | | |
| 10 | 11 | 12 | 13<br>Early Dismissal | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| | | MATH FOCUS: Objective 2 - Algebraic Concepts<br>Integrate Objectives 6 - 13 | | | | |
| 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 |
| | | MATH FOCUS: Objective 2 - Algebraic Concepts<br>Integrate Objectives 6 - 13 | | | | |
| 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
| | | MATH FOCUS: Objective 2 - Algebraic Concepts<br>Integrate Objectives 6 - 13 | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

*Source:* Brazosport Independent School District. Used by permission.

objectives, and lists the textbook pages where they can find helpful, appropriate instructional materials. There are even helpful reminders about details that could easily be forgotten, such as "Please look at your TAAS specifications for samples of each target." All this is on one, user-friendly page.

The district's support for the Instructional Focus goes even further, by providing and organizing effective, targeted materials, in a "Lesson Bank" (see box, p. 114). Many of these materials are created by Brazosport teachers (and are good enough to have found a market in other Texas school districts).

Would that more students in underperforming schools had opportunities to learn the sound strategies in the Brazosport "Lesson Bank," so clearly consistent with methods like "SQ3R" (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review—which made such a difference in Oak Park Schools).

TAAS coordinator Susan Hinkle told me that "TAAS has ensured that kids can read. All we read are chapter books, not TAAS passages" and students at all the schools set personal reading goals. TAAS is promoting real reading and lots of it, an emphasis that incontrovertibly raises reading ability—and test scores. Clute Intermediate Reading Department Chair Charles Horsley told me that his school has made liberal use of the highly effective Accelerated Reader program and that subsequently

> Every kid is exposed to literature. They are reading stories, writing essays about what they read and interpreting stories. . . . You bet we teach to the test, we teach kids to organize thoughts, to think.

All this instructional focus is aligned with and intended to raise TAAS scores. And still, there are those who won't brook the notion that tests like the TAAS can promote a genuine and appropriate focus on literacy.

The Instructional Focus is mandatory, but the teaching materials in the Lesson Bank are optional—and being developed and added to daily. The Instructional Focus bank of materials is the repository for the great, standards-based strategies and lessons that constitute a common instructional arsenal. It reinforces Brazosport's ethos of clarity, alignment, and shared expertise.

Reflecting on Step 3, Instructional Focus, I'm reminded of Stan Pogrow's (1996) compelling point about the *real-life realities* of teaching: that expecting teachers to do all their own instructional planning, to gather and vet and refine their own materials entirely on their own is akin to expecting actors to not just act, but write all their own scripts.

✍ ✍ ✍

Let's take stock of Steps 1 through 3. Is any of this logistically prohibitive or time-consuming? The data analysis, the banking and cataloging of instructional materials? Not likely. These steps would, if anything, save time. As Davenport stressed, the team's common direction and shared resources prevents busy teachers from always "running around trying to find good materials." Instead, they are using and adding to the fund of expertise and materials in a system that makes them easily accessible.

The next step, an exciting one, adds yet another layer to Brazosport's efficiency and organization.

**Step 4: Assessment ("CHECK").** "Assessment" constitutes the "CHECK" in the "Plan, Do, Check, Act" cycle. A simple definition of this step informs us that: "After the Instructional focus has been taught, an assessment is administered to identify mastery/nonmastery students."

All teachers teach and assess. What distinguishes Brazosport is its use of periodic, common, *collective* assessment—used for formal purposes during the school year. The use of such short-term,

FIGURE 5.7 INSTRUCTIONAL FOCUS

**Subject:** Math

**Grade Level:** 3rd (1st and 2nd use as guideline with 2nd grade objectives)

**Objective:** 1 — The student will demonstrate an understanding of number concepts

**Targets:**
1a — Compare and order whole numbers
1b — Use whole number place value
1c — Use odd, evens, and skip counting
1d — Recognize and compare fractions using pictorial models
1e — Translate whole numbers (name to numeral/numeral to name)

**Instructional Dates:** August 21–September 8

**Assessment Date:** September 8

**Things to Note:**
• Textbook Pages:
1a — 40–41
1b — Chapter 2
1c — 36–37
1d — 400–417
1e — 32–33, 50–51, 52–53

• Please look at your TAAS specifications for samples of each target

• Target 1f (Recognize decimal place value) will be taught at a later date

*Source:* Brazosport Independent School District. Used by permission.
*Note: TAAS = Texas Assessment of Academic Skills.*

formal feedback enables teams, not just individuals, to adjust efforts for improved results (Schaffer, 1990). As we'll see, the results of these data determine where students should be optimally placed during electives, or what they call "Team Time," where they will receive either tutorial help or enrichment.

Here, too, the genius in these common assessments is economy. If we're realistic, we know that

• Time constraints make it difficult to conduct exhaustive and frequent assessment of ongoing student progress, but that

• Even a brief, focused assessment of student's mastery of specific skills is far better than none at all.

With this in mind, Brazosport conducts, on a prescribed schedule, ready-made, 4-item assessments coded to specific TAAS objectives in math and reading. Some of these are teacher-made. The common assessments are administered at the end of each instructional focus unit. Success for each 4-item assessment is defined as successfully completing 3 or more of the items.

To manage and record progress in these areas, district teachers use a standards-based grade book like the one in Figure 5.8, p.117, showing us, on each assessment for each objective, how many items out of 4 are correct.

Of course to know how the team is doing, it is essential that everyone conduct the periodic assessments and hand in their data reports on schedule. So there is another paper tool—an easy, fill-in-the-blank reminder from the assessment coordinator to teachers telling them which set of assessment data needs to be turned in. There is even space for teachers to provide an explanation if for some reason they can't turn in the assessment data at that time.

Steps 5 and 6 show how the system "Acts": how teachers respond to the data from these brief, frequent assessments.

**Step 5: Tutorials, and Step 6: Enrichment ("ACT"): Second Chances and Incentives.** Teacher teams follow or modify the instructional and assessment schedule on the basis of the regularly gathered assessment data in Step 4. Davenport indicated that "teachers can adjust if kids catch up quickly, but must let the principal know"—because, for monitoring purposes (Step 8), principals need to know exactly what is being taught when. Generally, if 80 percent or more of students have mastered the material, they move on. If less, teachers collaborate, review, and reteach.

**Brazosport's "Lesson Bank"**

The lessons in the bank are labeled and catalogued *by objective*, affording both new and veteran teacher with proven, targeted materials that can save time and promote effectiveness.

This is great stuff. Here are some examples:

• The "What If" page. Subtitled "Integrating Objectives 10–13", it contains 8 variants on the same math problem, each providing practice for different, but related, TAAS math objectives.

• A teacher's lucid 2-páragraph description of a method with which she'd had great success. Entitled "A Logical Approach to Problem Solving," it includes a reference to the specific TAAS objective it addresses and informs us that the method

> enables a student to identify the correct computational operation needed to solve a story problem *100 percent of the time* (my emphasis).

Her address and phone number are included in case anyone has implementation questions. Again: how many such great ideas now lie hidden in systems that have no organized apparatus for sharing teaching strategies?

• Two 11-step processes: "Test-Taking Strategies"—one for reading, the other for math.

Sound suspect? Everything in them defies the misleading stereotype of test-preparation activities as a supposed waste of instructional time. All of the steps are consistent with excellent pedagogy:

– *In reading*, an emphasis on reviewing titles and subtitles before reading a selection, predicting what the passage might be about; and underlining clues that might help answer comprehension and interpretive questions.

– *In math*, students are asked to "whisper read" the story problems three times, to form mental pictures of what they are reading, to "thoroughly study graphs, charts, and diagrams," to "circle key words in the questions," and then to "Evaluate the solution to make sure that it 'makes sense.'"

• A reminder that test preparation and good reading instruction do not have to be at odds. Teachers are reminded that students must be able to "justify their answers using the information/clues in the text," and to be able to answer a variety of higher-order and interpretive questions like "What will happen when . . ?" and "_____ happened because . . . ."

• "90-minute Lesson Samples" for math and reading—versatile templates that suggest ways to effectively use instructional time.

FIGURE 5.8 Math Assessment Profile, Grade 3

TEACHER: _____

| | 1. Michelle | 2. John | 3. Megan | 4. Luis | 5. Sara |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **OBJECTIVE 1** | | | | | |
| Compare and order whole numbers (1a) | | | | | |
| Use whole number place value (1b) | | | | | |
| Use odds, evens, and skip counting (1c) | | | | | |
| Recognize/compare fractions (1d) | | | | | |
| Translate whole numbers (1e) | | | | | |
| Recognize decimal place value (1f) | | | | | |
| **OBJECTIVE 2** | | | | | |
| Use whole number properties and inverse operations (2a) | | | | | |
| Determine missing elements in pattern (2b) | | | | | |
| Number line representations (2c) | | | | | |
| Classify objects (2d) | | | | | |
| **OBJECTIVE 3** | | | | | |
| Recognize two-/three-dimensional figures (3a) | | | | | |
| Describe/compare two-/three-dimensional shapes (3b) | | | | | |

*Source.* Brazosport Independent School District. Adapted by permission.

But the remaining students—20 percent or less—aren't forgotten. They receive extra focused instruction—the "Tutorials" that constitute Step 5—while the rest have options; they can choose from a list of electives or "Enrichment" courses (Step 6).

This means that students in the system are regularly brought to a crossroads: *Success on both annual and periodic assessments means choices; failure means needed tutoring during the 30- to 60-minute elective periods known as "team time."*

Again, there is some flexibility in the system. Patty Edgington, Math Department Chair at Clute Intermediate, told me that on some campuses, struggling students get a longer or "expanded" math class. But on their campus, students who fall behind must enroll in an *additional* math class—until they catch up.

Obviously, we need to make distinctions between this "crossroads" and the kind of "tracking" that people like Jeanne Oakes (1985) rightly decry. It is only too obvious from Brazosport's results that tutorial students are never treated as hopeless cases relegated to groups that will never catch up. On the contrary, they succeed—at stunning rates—by attending tutorials and remedial classes, and thus "earning" electives, as Davenport puts it. Electives become an effective incentive for first-time success. This actually acts to reduce the number of students who slack off and hence need to retake units or classes. As Davenport makes clear,

> It is not a punitive thing, and we have had strong support from parents. . . . Students begin to take achievement and test scores very seriously—because it dictates their schedule.

Brazosport has earned the right to deprive kids, if you will, of the "enrichment" courses we wish all of them could take. But even parents there can see the importance of the tutorials and the clear evidence that their child is not being sentenced forever to the "slow" track. On the contrary, the children are being given the chance to master foundational skills as quickly as possible in a system that has a 90 percent *plus* record of succeeding with kids from every subgroup.

The aim, in all they do, is to accelerate learning, to ensure success *during*, not after the school year. Consider the following story that Davenport tells about yet another teacher-invented improvement to their system:

> It used to be that if you fail TAAS in middle school, you go to summer school. Kids hated it. Because they hated it, attendance was low. . . . We decided to move the funds spent on summer school to three weeks before the test, and we got far better results. We paid teachers $20 an hour [to teach kids in after-school classes] and sent a letter home saying, "Please let us have your kids each afternoon. We'll feed them pizza and cokes Monday through Thursday." None of this health food [she laughs]. The pizza and cokes are a great incentive, and the kids liked the attention they were getting. There are only 10 kids per teacher in these classes.

Another incentive is built into the 8th grade test, which the district takes seriously—as must students. Kids have several chances to take 8th grade tests if their scores are low in any core area. Rather than act as a disincentive to pass these tests the first time, there is a real incentive: The retests are given on Saturdays, not a time most kids want to be at school.

**Step 7: Maintenance ("CHECK").** "Maintenance" ensures that learning endures. Students tend to forget skills over time and need more than one crack at learning something before it is truly mastered. For this reason, maintenance and review are carefully interwoven and scheduled into the calendar, with more intense reviews conducted during the weeks just before TAAS testing. It is baffling, really, that more school systems do not set time aside to at least review assessed areas of weakness in the weeks before annual testing

If such procedures seem redundant or counterproductive, we might consider that this actually reflects some interesting research by Frank Dempster (1991), whose research articles always intrigue. In an article touting the benefits of ongoing review, he found that "Spaced repetitions are likely to encourage exactly the kinds of constructive mental processes, founded on effort and concentration, that teachers hope to foster" (p. 72).

Like all else here, the guidelines and materials for "Maintenance" are clear, coded to TAAS standards, and easily accessible to teachers. They make use of maintenance overheads and transparencies published by Kamico Instructional Media (1994) on a simple recommended schedule. But here, too, they have made—and marketed—their own maintenance materials, as well.

"Maintenance" is *not* busywork. The district's "Maintenance Guidelines" and materials explicitly direct teaching staff not to use the overheads as worksheets but as the basis for active learning and "modeling" of skills and thought processes. The recommendation is for interactive and direct instruction throughout.

Steps 1 through 7 provide a powerful system for assessing performance, organizing and improving instruction, and thus ensuring higher rates of student success. Now let's look at Step 8: the simple, eminently replicable leadership structures and practices that keep the system humming.

**Step 8: Monitoring ("CHECK").** This entire chapter is about leadership, about structures and practices that began with Anderson and Davenport's active interest in creating and sustaining a more aligned instructional system. They didn't create it. But they led it—they organized the expertise necessary to succeed.

For Brazosport, the heart of Step 8, and of leadership, is the principal, who, "as the instructional leader, is actively involved in the teaching/learning process" (see box). For me, "Monitoring" is one of most exciting features of this exciting system.

**Practical Principal Leadership**

The principal:

1. Visits classrooms daily.
2. Logs observations relative to the specific objectives being taught (using a simple observation log where the lesson, objective and comments are recorded).
3. Conducts meetings with teachers and students.
4. Meets regularly with departments and teams to monitor student's instructional progress.

Principals aren't "encouraged" to be instructional leaders; through such simple routines and requirements, they *become* better instructional leaders. As Davenport puts it,

> The principal is *required* to go into classrooms, to become a stronger instructional leader by seeing how teachers teach kids. They must be in there. . . . If two weeks go by, the kids or teachers will come by and ask the principal "Where have you been?"

Why this strong emphasis on classroom observations? First, because, as Davenport told me, "If a teacher says, 'I don't know how to teach inference,' the administrator can say 'Well, I've seen this teacher teach it like this.'" Second, as I both heard and read in Brazosport's written materials, these visits *drive home the message that learning is the purpose of school*—for teachers and students.

We are what we do. Administrators are also required to meet with individual teachers and teacher teams. Regardless of where a principal may be on the instructional leadership spectrum, such observations and meetings, combined with a clear

purpose—of monitoring the quality and progress toward that year's goals—would make anyone a better instructional leader. In truth, it would richly improve a system that currently relies far too heavily on twice-yearly official teacher evaluations—which typically have little or no influence on teaching or achievement (Glickman, 1991).

Interestingly, as Brazosport's schools have so clearly succeeded, a sensible policy developed, one characteristic of systems focused more on results than on a legalistic concern with processes: The daily classroom observations and logs are not required as long as your school is successful. Most principals continue to do them, anyway.

These procedures solve an enormous but unseen problem: the average principal's lack of confidence in the instructional realm, combined with the manic nature and duties of the principalship. Simple routines and requirements—in such an elegant and aligned system—contribute to the ongoing education of the school administrator while ensuring that instructional priorities get their due. Brazosport's procedures could be adopted by any school or system.

## An Emphasis on Monitoring

### The "TAAS Talk"

A crucial part of "Monitoring" is the "TAAS Talk"—an annual, one-on-one conversation between every student and a teacher or administrator. The principals themselves meet every 3rd and 4th grade student, each of whom gets a sticker for having had the "TAAS Talk". Davenport points out that students, surprisingly, enjoy these carefully scheduled appointments. "Their attitude is 'You bet I'll sit down with an adult to do this.' They like the attention."

The procedure lasts 15 minutes. Students review each objective with the teacher or administrator, color-coding—like Oak Park—for strength or weakness (Green = Fantastic; Yellow = Borderline; Pink = Needs Work).

A clear, two-page procedure makes these talks easy for anyone to conduct, including new teachers. Every exigency is covered: what to do with students new to the district; what to do with previously exempt students, like special education students (*93 percent of special ed students now reach TAAS standards*). They even suggest a way to adjust the procedure to avoid hurting feelings if it appears that there will be too much "pink" (Needs Work) on a student's TAAS report. Every student and parent receives a copy of the report for future reference. They have found that it is more effective and efficient to conduct this particular session without the presence of the child's parents.

### Central Office Leadership—At the Ground Level

All central office administrators must participate in the TAAS Talks, as well. Each of them sits down with at least 30 students. Central office leaders also must visit classrooms and log observations regularly—just as principals do.

"God is in the details." Here, too, is alignment. If we want school, district, and central office priorities to mesh, what better way to model and inspire leadership than to visibly participate and struggle with the same challenges? Davenport learned that when we're out of our depth, observations can be challenging. Nonetheless, because of her ongoing experience with focused classroom observations, she found that she could say, "I can't actually teach higher math, but now I can talk it."

### Monitoring Quality—And Climate

Another aspect of monitoring is staying in touch and finding ways to gauge how people feel about their work environment. If attitude is everything, then it helps to know enough about it to adjust it as we go. We've seen what a benefit this has been to Oak Park and Milwaukee.

Superintendent Anderson would begin every day by going out to individual schools and departments to discuss topics of concern to his staffs. To gauge satisfaction levels, they conduct regular surveys. Their Internal Customer Survey (ICS) enables them to monitor employee satisfaction, well-being, and personal and professional development.

The ICS has 15 survey items, scored from 1 (lowest) to 8 (highest). Anything with a score of less than 4 is targeted to be addressed by planning and budget considerations. Respondents can also use these surveys to make suggestions for improvement. In 1993, 9 of 15 items had scores of 4 or less; by 1997, they were down to 3. Their mantra: Monitor and adjust.

In another exciting area, Brazosport has been providing cash incentives for schools that improve. A school committee decides how the money will be spent—on payroll stipends, technology purchases, or supplies and materials. As school systems and states like Colorado experiment with pay-for-performance plans, they might do well to consult Brazosport teachers as they fine-tune their schemes.

✍ ✍ ✍

Brazosport Independent School District demonstrates the power of a singular focus on results. The board and central office don't clutter or confuse schools with a jumble of aims. The district's goal is simple and more than enough for most districts:

> **Goal:** Student assessment results will show NO significant difference in performance between any student groups.

What Brazosport has wrought, in demolishing socioeconomic differences in achievement, should leave us breathless. But it only attests to something that, in fact, any school system is capable of creating, at which the schools treated here so manifestly excel: a singular, vigilant, and collective focus on results.

➤ *Gerald Anderson and Patricia Davenport retired in 2000. For more information about Brazosport schools, contact the superintendent: Rudy Okruhlik, Drawer 2, Freeport, TX 77541; phone: 979-265-6181.*

# Synthesis: From Successful Systems to a New "Improvement Literacy": Opportunities for Immediate, Unprecedented Achievement

## Teamwork, Goals, and Data

The lessons to be learned from these districts are legion, primarily for how well they demonstrate the power of teamwork, measurable goals, and simple data analysis for achieving results.

Within that framework, this synthesis is an attempt to combine the lessons these districts teach us—the concrete principles and practices that have the best chance of having an immediate and unprecedented effect on student learning results within the next few years. The summary will focus on

- The fundamentals of improvement.
- Simple, accessible ways to demystify and engage student assessment.
- Results-oriented leadership.

The chapter concludes with a call for a redefinition of teacher and administrative training.

## The Fundamentals of Improvement

**Simplify school improvement planning—and involve *all* instructional staff in data analysis and goal setting.** The single most important event of the school year is the time we set aside for annual improvement planning. As goes planning, so goes the school's chances for improvement that year. This *does not* mean that good planning has to be complicated or excessively time consuming. We must remember that the essence of annual planning is merely to review data, set a manageable set of measurable achievement goals, and then establish times on the calendar when faculty will meet to discuss ways to reach those goals.

To successfully facilitate this most important annual exercise:

- *Use simple paper forms and templates to guide improvement planning.* The districts discussed

in this book demonstrate that simple paper forms and explicit procedures play a huge role in keeping this important task on track. Manually-completed improvement planning checklists, goal-setting, and data analysis forms help teams to efficiently analyze, prioritize, and organize themselves for improvement—in minutes (see Appendixes A and B). They save time, promote focus and introduce order and a fair—vs. onerous—accountability.

• *Keep it simple.* Improvement planning often complicates and diffuses the academic mission. To keep it simple: In the academic arena, planning should ensure that every faculty member at every school knows (1) their measurable achievement goal or goals for that year, (2) the areas of weakness revealed through data analysis for each goal, and (3) the day and time each month (or more often) when they will meet with their respective teams to improve instruction to reach their goals.

It can be that simple. School staff must emphasize, memorize, and monitor these principles throughout the year—not lose them in a sea of competing objectives or processes that pose as learning goals. If teachers don't have these goals memorized, year round, we've got a problem. Leaders must refer to and ask about these goals incessantly—with "boorish redundancy," to quote Rick DuFour. The district office—or its designees—must review and provide feedback for each school improvement plan, until it's right.

**Become obsessive about productive teamwork—and provide the tools and procedures essential to its success.** Teamwork, as we know it, needs an overhaul. Simple tools and materials could enable us to take a quantum leap toward more productive collaboration. I would recommend the routine use of the following teaming tools and materials:

**Teaming Tools**

• Whiteboard/flipchart and markers at every meeting.

• Team Learning logs (see Appendix D, or similar logs like Figure 5.7 in the Brazosport chapter).

• "Effective, Time-Efficient Meetings" template (Appendix F or the "Instructional Teaming Guidelines" in Chapter 5 (Brazosport).

• Brainstorming guidelines (e.g., Appendix C). Use or adopt your own version of these.

**Materials—A folder or notebook brought to every meeting that contains**

• Data/test score reports—in the simplest, most concise format available.

• Easily acquired interpretive guides to the respective state assessments or other standardized tests—or pages from them that include lists, descriptions, and sample items for the assessed standards.

• Alternative forms of the test, if available (e.g., Form S of the Stanford 9).

• Writing rubrics and other benchmarks, such as exemplar papers from state and district assessments.

Such tools and materials, if made available at every team meeting, would all but guarantee more focused and productive collaboration.

In sum, teams should know that they are expected to be inventing, adapting or adopting better strategies for teaching to areas of weakness revealed by their assessment data. Teachers must begin to regard themselves as researchers, inventors, whose collective discoveries can benefit the entire system.

**Start a Research and Development program—now!** The notion of district-based, teacher-conducted "R&D" might sound lofty or pretentious; it is not. Every one of these districts demonstrates that it is eminently within our grasp to build such systems. Start tomorrow morning.

It should begin with teams. We might start by offering a small reward or incentive for any team that can come up with a more effective way to teach to an assessed skill on which students scores are low. All the team needs to do is test it, refine it—and then describe both the strategy and its results on paper, in as brief and simple a form as possible. Put a name and a phone number on it.

Your research and development program is off and running. Now expand it systematically by doing the following:

• *Advertise breakthrough strategies and lessons—by subject area and subskill.* Make these lessons available at every site in centralized files, in a newsletter—or post them on the Web. Do "all-calls" among the schools for areas of difficulty and ask teachers if they have created, learned, or read about a proven practice that can help greater numbers of kids to master these skills. Reward and recognize "creative swiping" (Peters, 1987) and refinements in the same way as you reward original ideas.

R&D is no more complicated than this. All it should ever mean is that you are identifying challenges and seeking new, better solutions directly and systematically.

Then multiply its impact:

• *Start conducting quarterly or summertime "Lesson Fairs"* (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999, p. 116), where teachers and teams do brief demos on challenging subject matter, followed by questions and answers. Pay teachers for presenting or attending. Use Eisenhower or Title I funds—as many schools have done—that might have been less productively spent on some speech or workshop that had no real connection to student learning goals.

In the early going, have a team open every central office meeting with a five-minute presentation describing an effective strategy or lesson and its results. Then watch as other principals begin to "get it" and go back to their faculties with their new vision of simple, inexorable improvement (we saw this happen in Tucson—three brief presentations did more to clarify continuous improvement than any number of seminars).

• *Look within and beyond the district for effective strategies. Find your highest performers—teams, teachers and schools.* Tell teachers to keep their antennae up for schools in the area that are clearly getting great results, even if it's in just one stubborn area where your students have struggled. Arrange substitutes, buy the teachers lunch when they visit other schools, and treat them like royalty if they will do the following: (1) Write up what they saw—*including evidence of effectiveness*—and (2) do a brief presentation demonstrating what they saw or learned.

The gap between these simple, doable R&D initiatives and the rarity with which they occur should only inspire us. Let's jump on this one immediately—and watch the culture of continuous improvement blossom before our eyes.

## Testing—Now and in the Future

**Demystify and promote a right regard for state and standardized tests.** "Go to the danger," Michael Fullan likes to say. He is speaking expressly of state and external tests and accountability systems—not passively, not without speaking out against wrong-headed or unfair assessment items or practices, but with a fair regard for the fact that, warts and all, state assessment and accountability systems establish the context for improvement (cited in Schmoker, 2000, p. 64).

One of the rewards of "going to the danger" is watching your teachers discover that these tests are neither as bad nor as secretive as their most shrill critics would have us believe.

I frequently like to play a friendly trick on audiences: I read a handful of questions that ask students to grasp main idea, interpret or make judgments about a character's remarks or actions, and to speculate or infer from events in a story. For each item, I ask—aloud—if these are "lower-order" or "higher-order" questions. Audiences overwhelmingly reply that they are *higher-order* questions. Many are incredulous when I tell them that (1) these are from *norm-referenced standardized tests* and that (2) such items constitute the largest portion of the reading battery on these tests.

We should never lose sight of the limitations of the multiple-choice format. Nor should we forget that kids whose reading instruction includes lots of just such questions, answered and discussed frequently, both orally and in writing, *will perform quite capably on state and standardized tests*. Or that even the factual items on these tests help us to assess a student's general level of literacy, their facility with text, and retention of material. Most teachers, when probed, want their own children to do well on these tests and are concerned if they don't.

**Learn how to use information about standardized tests—for your students' benefit.** If these tests, limitations and all, are legitimate, then we need to learn all we can about their content. Here's how:

• *Start using the Teachers' Guides—the tools of the assessment trade.* We've already referred to the importance of teachers having the right documents at hand during team meetings—like pages from the "Teachers' Guides" or other interpretive supplements. They contain writing rubrics, annotated exemplars of student work, and detailed lists of exactly which skills and standards students will encounter in their state assessments. In most cases, there are even sample items for each assessed skill.

But the majority of teachers know little or nothing about these essential tools, which are *available to all districts from the state or the test manufacturer.* I regularly show pages from these essential documents to audiences of teachers. When I ask if they recognize them; *almost no one does.* When I tell them the titles, and that anyone in the school system can buy and use these, they frantically scribble down the titles, amazed that such information is available—and suddenly hopeful that they just might be able to align teaching to assessed standards after all.

Without the chance to thoroughly review these guides, it is ludicrous for us to expect teachers to have a fair regard for tests, or to think they have any chance of realizing steady, annual improvements on them. We may just as well expect a stellar performance from an actor who has never seen the script.

These straightforward "Teachers' Guides" or other documents are not to be confused with many of the exhaustive and confusing "state standards documents" that have proliferated. These long lists are often written in confusing language (Wolk, 1998). Richard Elmore (an advocate of standards) refers to their "clumsy and overspecified form" (2000, p. 10). Worst of all, they defy the reality that "less is more" in effective instruction, and often have only a remote connection to actual state and standardized tests. Subsequently, they can do more to confuse and overwhelm than to clarify what should be taught and learned (Schmoker & Marzano, 1999). Be careful with them.

• *Examine the details for every grade level and subject.* Imagine if teachers, whose students are performing poorly in, say, "Measurement" on the Stanford 9, knew exactly what kinds of measurement are in fact tested. What if teachers knew that 2nd graders must know how to

- Count and trade coins.
- Make change.
- Find a date on a calendar.
- Tell time to the nearest quarter hour.

We're daft not to apprehend both the practical and psychological benefits of such useful information, spelling out, as it does, the actual—and largely sensible—standards these tests contain.

• *Take immediate action to obtain and use assessment information.* Now here's a problem with a remedy. We should immediately

- Buy multiple copies of these invaluable "Teachers' Guides" and other documents, and then insist on their use as part of the improvement process.
- Expect these to be present at every improvement meeting, to be marked-up, dog-eared, and discussed by teams to the obvious benefit of teaching.
- Relentlessly bombard teachers with evidence from real schools that such systematic efforts to engage and take on these tests lead to higher achievement—with obvious benefits for kids.

State and standardized tests need to be both engaged and critiqued—but also vigilantly evaluated and improved (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, pp. 73–74; Schmoker, 2000).

**Create end-of-course assessments for *every course at every grade level.*** If we believe that the use of data is crucial to improvement, then we must get beyond a kind of double standard—on the one hand, anxious to examine data with respect to progress in reading, math, and perhaps writing—but not, curiously, for every grade level or for every subject taught. In everything from kindergarten reading to high school art or geometry, most systems still operate in the absence of common standards and data. Year to year, we don't know if we are doing better or worse, or which areas are in greatest need of attention.

The solution is home-grown, end-of-course assessments, like those used in Glendale Union and Adlai Stevenson. These common assessments should always have a performance component, but the assessments needn't be excessively long or "comprehensive." End-of-course assessments should focus on the most *essential learning,* for, as Grant Wiggins writes, "If everything is important, then nothing is important" (1998, p. 223).

In Lake Havasu City, Arizona, teachers were paid to develop such assessments on essential standards for most courses. They completed these assessments in a reasonable time and on a reasonable budget—about $28,000 for all core courses and many electives. Every team I've ever worked with has felt that these common assessments resulted in *greater coherence, communication, common purpose, and improved instruction.* Why? Because these collectively constructed assessments capture the genius and perspective of many minds.

**Conduct periodic, "pre-emptive" assessments.** This same minimalist approach can work with respect to common, periodic assessment, as well. Here, too, we can begin quickly by starting with any willing team or school or department who will simply convert conventional grade book data into quarterly or periodic data.

Want to know if 2nd graders are making adequate progress toward their year-end goal? As in Oak Park, ask teachers to anonymously submit running record data—already in their grade books—in the form of a fraction. This takes mere minutes. But notice how data like that in Figure 6.1 would alert the team and the building principal to the need for timely intervention—like more time and focus, fresh resources, a different approach, or extra tutoring.

Submitting the data is easy; teachers can supply them to the principal or teacher leader on simple 3" x 5" cards like the one in Figure 6.2.

FIGURE 6.1 PERIODIC ASSESSMENT DATA

| *Grade* | *1st Quarter* | *2nd Quarter* | *3rd Quarter* | *End-of-Year* | *Goal* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4th Grade | 39% | 46% | 54% | 82% | 4% over last year |

*Note:* Percentage of students making adequate or better progress to reach grade-level proficiency by the end of the year.

Writing is also a good place to start—the common assessment is ready made in the form of a state or district rubric.

**Enlist—and pamper—start-up teams who will try these simple systems.** When performance improves, as it almost inevitably will, ask these teachers—your R&D heroes—to present their results and experience to administrators and other faculties, on video if necessary. Then invite—even compensate—other teams to develop and use periodic assessments for other courses. These tests can be as simple as the semester assessments used in courses at Adlai Stevenson or variations on the quick 4-item assessments used periodically by Brazosport. Or develop adaptations of the cumulative, quarterly assessments in the Scott-Foresman/Addison Wesley Math series (assessments like these are the wave of the future for other series, I'll wager).

**"Dress Rehearsals"—a month or two before annual or high-stakes testing.** Finally, as we've seen, any system can benefit from conducting trial tests a month or two before annual assessments. This gives us a chance to make

FIGURE 6.2 ANONYMOUS DATA-COLLECTION CARD

2nd Grade 1st quarter

12/27

*Note:* The fraction 12/27 represents 12 students making adequate progress, out of a class of 27 students.

provision for extra instruction after school, during lunch, or even—as some districts do—on Saturdays, during the summer, or on Spring break.

We're just beginning to realize the immense strategic and psychological benefits of periodic assessment and data analysis. Start simply. But start.

## Leadership: Minding the Store

> The purpose of leadership is the improvement of instructional practice and performance.
>
> —RICHARD ELMORE

**Leadership is as leadership does.** Too much leadership research and preparation is beclouded by a glut of generalities and theories. Elmore writes that "Leadership tends to be romanticized in American culture, especially in the culture of schooling," that we manifestly fail to make the improvement of instruction its clear priority (2000, p. 13). DuFour and Eaker cite Michael Fullan's finding that the research "has failed to provide the specificity and practical applications" needed to tell leaders what to do or where to start (1998, p. 125). We have yet to share, propound, and confidently insist on even a few of the simplest actions and priorities that would have a huge effect in the instructional realm.

We've been reading about such priorities in this book—school improvement processes like simple data analysis, goal-setting, and productive teaming. Any administrator worthy of the position can manage and master these priorities. They are neither overwhelming nor exceedingly difficult. Yet they are rarely taught systematically or given the priority they deserve.

**First things first.** Let's now look at those few but essential "first things" that any leader, from central office staff to teacher leaders, can and must do to achieve better results.

### Manage by Asking Questions

**The importance of the central office.** The buck stops here: For each of these districts, someone at the central office oversaw the essential duties we've enumerated in this chapter. Someone, usually an assistant superintendent or curriculum director, must attend to collaborative, data-driven, goal-oriented continuous improvement. Currently, not enough districts have such a person—someone truly charged to monitor and maintain these priorities.

Doing so may be easier than we think. Dale Dauten, in his book *The Gifted Boss* (1999), points out that management begins with asking questions—something administrators in these districts do routinely. Consider what might happen if key people at the central office regularly asked questions like the following at every site visit and at administrative meetings.

**The right questions—asked again and again.** Once we know that all instructional teams have completed annual data analysis and goal setting, central office administrators should begin to ask building administrators questions like the following, without embarrassment, on an ongoing basis:

1. Do *all* teachers at *all times* during the school year, know their limited number of annual improvement goals—to the number? (e.g., "to improve in reading from 39% of students at or above grade level to 44% by the end of the school year"). What evidence do you have of this?

2. Can every teacher, at any point during the school year, tell you precisely which areas of weakness their team is currently concentrating on during their regular team meetings? (e.g., "measurement" or "statistics and probability" in Math—or related subskills subsumed within these).

3. When are your (at least monthly) improvement meetings scheduled?

4. What evidence do you have that the team's meetings are productive? What successful strategies are being generated, refined, and learned to promote improvement in the identified areas of weakness?

It wouldn't hurt to prepare administrators for the great cultural change these questions represent, to bring the group to an acknowledgment that these are patently fair questions with huge implications for whether our schools will succeed or stagnate. We may need to negotiate misunderstandings or address anxieties that these questions might provoke. But because the substance of these questions is so central to improvement, someone at the district office must be asking them again and again—once again, with "boorish redundancy."

Regardless of who is given primary responsibility for such questioning and monitoring, the district office team must act in concert. Instructional directors or assistant superintendents must have the active partnership and support of the superintendent and the school board. In truth, the teacher's role and willingness to provide this information is most important of all; without it, the principal's opportunity to lead—to monitor and support improvement—is seriously hobbled.

If we can't ask such questions, then we are indeed beholden to merely "running"—not improving—schools and the quality of our kids' education. If we won't ask these questions, we may someday be replaced by those who will.

One of the best places to ask questions is at the monthly or twice-monthly administrative meetings.

**Model Effective Teamwork at the Central Office**

**"First things" at administrative meetings.** If academic achievement is job one, you'd never know it by attending most administrative meetings (Smith and Andrews 1989). Sometimes we inoculate ourselves at these meetings with presentations that have only a remote connection to achievement. But what would happen if even 30 minutes per month were devoted to asking questions like the above?

The agenda at such meetings could be brutally simple: variations on the previous questions combined with one-minute descriptions, by principals, of a successful, proven strategy (or an instructive failure) from one of their teacher teams, with its attendant results. The team learning logs would make such sharing a snap. If principals have little to share—if teams aren't meeting, or aren't generating successful strategies—this is the best way to take the district's pulse, and to provide administrators with an opportunity to address and overcome common problems.

This strategy could have a cascade effect, as principals conveyed to their teacher teams that they were expected to share lessons or instructional successes—or frustrations—at these monthly meetings. What a great message that would send throughout the organization,

- as teachers began to see that administrators were modeling the same kind of teamwork expected of them,
- as they began to see their contribution not only to their own school but to the entire system, and
- as principals returned from these meetings with successful strategies and stories from around the district.

We are what we talk about. If our central office agendas don't reflect targeted, academic priorities, neither will our schools. We need to stop acting as though instruction is a private realm, as though good practice and improvement are foregone.

**The role of the principal.** Yes, there are myriad duties and obligations that principals must tackle day in and day out. But there is still time, and a manifest imperative, that we routinely ask

questions about goals, challenges and new strategies of teams and individual teachers.

They are the key to the instructional focus and the productive expectations that must be nourished and tended to incessantly. They are also the key to—and the model for—shared leadership.

**The role of the teacher leader.** All teachers are leaders inasmuch as they must lead and influence others as members of a team. But teaching is still too much a "flat" career, with potentially "deadening" effects (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996, p. 11). We need to create more opportunities for vigorous, substantive leadership, to more fully develop and capitalize on teachers' expertise without forcing them to leave the classroom. The combination of an administrator and a practicing teacher is a powerful one—able to bring both authority and classroom credibility together in the service of results.

There are lots of ways to make this happen. We can provide small stipends; we can provide release time to teachers who will exercise real, not token responsibility for results. Teacher leaders should be asking the previous set of questions of themselves, of teams, and of faculties. Department heads, project leaders, coordinators, all of whom can and do continue to have instructional duties, need to be asking these same questions.

And they should earn these opportunities and rewards—by virtue of the results they have achieved with students, not merely by personality or political prowess.

### Immediately Institute a Recognition and Reward System

Recognition and reward for a job well done may be leadership's most effective but underused tool—a kind of "secret weapon." The research on this is abundant and has been ignored, at our expense, for long enough (see research cited in Schmoker, 1999, pp. 111-112).

We need to

- *Tell stories: Open every meeting*, including board meetings, with at least one quick story about a better lesson or strategy that helped a teacher or team to get better results. There is no such thing as a "mundane" result; if a new strategy or lesson helped 5 more kids learn to punctuate or to construe a scatterplot, *honor those teachers, by name.*
- *Celebrate and recognize problems solved,* thresholds reached, or clearly goal-oriented accomplishments—like the creation of periodic or end of course assessments—if only for a single course. This is just the stuff that primes the pump and inspires others to follow suit. (see Appendix E, "Recognition Nomination Form").
- *Give them something!* A buck, a movie pass, gift certificates, rotating trophies, a 15-minute break, a free lunch at the school cafeteria, a faculty party/celebration for goals reached, thank you notes or certificates—even 3" x 5" cards with a compliment on a lesson; I've seen all of these work. Want other "no-cost, low-cost" ideas for recognizing employee contributions? Bob Nelson's best-selling book *1001 Ways to Reward Employees* is full of them (1994).

For long enough, an insidious "egalitarianism" has prevailed in schools at the expense of what almost any teacher knows—that people need praise and recognition to sustain effort (Senese, 2000/2001, p. 84). Do this and watch staff morale and the instructional focus get the boost they deserve.

### Employ Simple Strategies to Promote Both Rapid and Long-Term Progress

> It isn't the changes that do you in, it's the transitions.
>
> —WILLIAM BRIDGES

Here are some questions people often ask me at seminars: "How do we get started? How do we over-

come resistance? What steps can help to promote buy-in and a smooth successful transition?"

We've already mentioned one set of related strategies: celebration, reward, and appreciation. Let's add other related strategies—equally as potent but similarly and systematically underused.

We often regard data-driven practices as a bitter pill: hard to swallow but good for us (eventually). In fact, Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) landmark findings about productivity and well-being point right at the immediate and enduring psychological satisfactions of establishing goals and receiving feedback on the progress we're making toward the goals—the essence of the approach used by the schools and systems included in this book.

Confrontation and courage will always be a requirement for good leadership (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 112). But the journey to improvement will be faster, richer, and easier to manage if we begin to take advantage of the following opportunities available to us in a data-driven culture.

**First: Start with the data—and one goal.** Watch what happens when staff, working in teams, are asked to review their own data and set their own improvement thresholds. The analysis of real data has a magical way of engaging the attention and respect of practitioners. There is a difference between "data" and "tests"—in the abstract—and a real-time encounter with actual patterns of student weakness. These processes are even more palatable when we stop blaming and simply charge teacher teams to set, by themselves, at least one "conservative" (Peters 1987) improvement goal—that is, *for a modest increase in just one subject area*—with the understanding that they will establish a schedule of at least monthly team meetings to discuss ways to reach the goal. On its face, this is a fair and reasonable requirement for any school or system.

**Show teachers the tests *and their supplements.*** Again, the closer we look at actual tests, their explanatory guides, and sample items, the less alienating—and frightening—they become. On close inspection, (1) their legitimacy—the knowledge and skills the assessments require—become apparent and (2) they inspire hope because they clarify the limits and scope of what needs to be taught.

**Empower teachers to create their own end-of-course and performance assessments.** In every course, without exception, there are important skills that students should learn that simply will never be assessed with multiple-choice or state tests, despite their value for assessing nominal competency. Teachers know this. For every course, some sort of essay or performance should be required. It doesn't have to be long or overly complicated: In an art class, it could be an original work or critique; in a U.S. History class, an essay arguing for who the student regards as our least and most effective presidents; in World History, a proposal for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But the performance should represent those constructivist domains—those interpretations and opinions—that students need and teachers value. Even such simple measures will immediately enrich and intellectually enliven assessment and instruction.

**Focus on small, early successes in specific target areas.** We know that there will be varying degrees of commitment or optimism about these processes, especially in the early going. At first, many educators will simply be going through the motions of teamwork and improvement. Even for the most skeptical, however, there is nothing harder to resist than everyday evidence that these processes are making a difference. *The magic is in the little, immediate stuff your teachers will achieve*—the small adjustments or strategies that enable even more kids to master certain math proficiencies, or a way to engage readers in more minutes of sustained silent reading per day. Be there to

"catch" your more skeptical staff members the moment they engage in an effort that targets an area of weakness. At staff meetings, liberally praise anyone making such efforts or achieving *even modest results.* It may be the first time someone has noticed the contribution they make. Such actions will earn trust and enthusiasm while keeping the momentum going.

**Start with your go-getters** on more difficult initiatives. For example, many staff, reared as we've been on unfettered autonomy, find the notion of common end-of-course assessments unsettling. They can see its implications for less autonomy and greater accountability. They're not yet convinced of its benefits, for them or for students.

**"Start small,"** advises former Brazosport superintendent Gerald Anderson. Oak Park's Gary Marx recommends we begin not with everyone, but with our most "positive people" (Marx et al., 1997, p. 535). Glendale Union began doing systematic, data-driven performance assessment with the English department, where writing, one form of performance assessment, already had a home. In Tucson, periodic assessment—another paradigm-buster—began with just three teams, whose pioneering example—and excellent results—put a human face on improvement and emboldened other teams to try it.

**Get periodic assessment "pilots" off the ground immediately.** Few things are more motivating than short-term feedback on how we are progressing toward our goals. As pilot teams start to see results on periodic assessments, spread the word to other grade levels and schools. I've seen how exciting this can be, how resistance and skepticism can give way to enthusiasm with each quarterly progress report.

**Capture common vision through structured routines.** People might resist change, but they are starved for vision, for an ennobling, common purpose. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). Rick DuFour, for whom "vision" is a mantra, believes that the fastest route to vision is data analysis and goal-setting because these processes *define and make the vision concrete* (DuFour, 2000, p. 71). The formal data-analysis, goal-setting, and teaming procedures we've seen in these chapters—guided and reinforced by simple paper forms—give order to our efforts and make it easier to appraise the value of these improvement activities. For example, witness the impact of Milwaukee's disarmingly clunky "Treasure Hunt" forms or Brazosport's "Weak/Strong Objectives" forms or its "Instructional Teaming Log." These simple paper-and-pencil procedures foster buy-in by keeping our focus on the compelling challenges, strategies and results that are the best case for continuous improvement.

**Make these processes your own.** All school improvement efforts are ultimately local. Remember that the procedures and appendixes provided here can be used as is, or can be productively adjusted—and improved on—by people in your own district. Local factors can make or break an improvement effort. Sensitivity to these factors promotes local ownership.

**Change attitudes with evidence.** We're foolish not to recognize that perhaps the greatest, but least visible factor working against the expectation of improvement is attitudes—*especially attitudes about the link between socioeconomic status and achievement.* Most teachers, even today, have had insufficient exposure to evidence that *school and classroom improvement can beat socioeconomic factors* where the school is organized for improvement. We need to bombard our staffs with evidence of this from within and without—stories, results, strategies that demonstrate that unprecedented proportions of our children can reach high

standards. Have staff read—and discuss—Jeff Howard's (1995) landmark article on student efficacy—that "smart" is not something students are given; it's something they become. Our belief about what kids *can* learn is perhaps the greatest factor affecting how much they *will* learn. We have a responsibility to marshall all the evidence that virtually all children can reach high standards, regardless of race or economic disadvantage.

## Conclusion: A Call for New Priorities in Teacher and Leadership Training

In 1910, the medical world reinvented itself with Abraham Flexner's call for doctors everywhere to organize, disseminate, and refine the best extant medical knowledge. Until then, medicine was hopelessly primitive and provincial, in some places characterized by traditional but untested practices that were literally killing people. The impact of Flexner's work, on people cured and lives saved, is incalculable.

Such a shake-up is now in order in education. Some of the paradoxes we face include:

- Proven practices, like cooperative learning, are widely taught—but grossly misunderstood and virtually ignored in the classroom (Antil, Jenkins, Wayne, & Vadasy, 1998). And there is widespread malpractice. Billions of dollars have been spent and millions of miles traveled by agencies purporting to assist schools; expensive long-term consulting contracts are completed, with untold numbers of contact hours—*with no results*. In many of these cases, no one so much as confronts the fact that teachers are never charged to review data and set measurable achievement goals, never asked to develop strategies aimed at areas where achievement is low. And achievement itself—actual evidence of improvement—is either ignored or treated as peripheral.
- Few educators, including the brightest and most committed, have been helped to make distinctions between proven, well-substantiated practices or programs and so-called "research-based" programs (Carnine, 1993).
- Lists of "comprehensive School Reform Designs" are generated, generously funded, and presented, at considerable expense, to audiences of educators at lengthy seminars, even though the vast majority have a miserable record of actually helping more students learn (Fashola & Slavin, 1998). The programs are thus endowed with a prestige that is wholly unwarranted.
- Staff development is still in its infancy and continues to be characterized by unproven, faddish initiatives that have no proven or practical relation to higher achievement (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997).
- Faculties of higher education travel, conduct studies, write papers, receive grant funding, give and listen to seminars at national congresses—while evidence of the best and most effective schools and practices goes begging—or is seldom if ever mentioned in preservice courses and administrative preparation in colleges and universities.

I'll never forget an encounter with a fellow teacher who told me that he had learned that the Coleman report was the final statement on achievement—with its dismal conclusion that as goes SES (socioeconomic status), so goes achievement (a conclusion that Coleman has since graciously and emphatically rescinded) (Seeley, 1999; see Coleman et al., 1966, for the original report). When I sent my friend stories of schools that had beaten the odds, he was dumbfounded—but inspired. It was my turn to be dumbfounded when I later discovered that he was just completing a doctorate—in education.

In education, to a scary extent, it is not yet 1910. Our universities, associations, and training programs have yet to establish simple procedures for vetting, promoting, and refining practices that can and will help more—far more—students learn. There is no excuse for this, for our failure to work backward from compelling, available evidence that

could alter the landscape of our current expectations and achievement; no excuse for highly-funded research that fails to work from and to stand on the shoulders of *the best that we already know*—to make continued advances. There is no doubt that today's teaching and administrative force would meet unheard-of levels of education with such new, but oh-so-desperately needed training and assistance from universities and professional associations.

Districts like those described in this book—and there are so many others—aren't perfect. They don't need to be. Singly and together, they represent the opportunity to equalize education for the next generation of students, of boys and girls from every background. They represent nothing less than a possible future where all students, even the most brilliant, can receive a vastly better education, where the gap between traditionally low-achieving and higher-achieving groups is reduced considerably, where every child has roughly the same chance as any other of entering professions, of having a voice, of making their way in the world—of being able to read Plato or write a business proposal—regardless of where they grew up or the color of their skin.

All this, without exaggeration, awaits us. Schools and districts like these represent that possible future and invite the question:

*How many successful schools must we see before we seize the moment and act—systematically—on the best we know?*

# Appendix A

## Annual School Improvement Planning Process/Checklist

1. Take stock during the summer. After the year-end student performance data comes in, the entire faculty should

- Celebrate accomplishments!
- Gather the data or evidence of success.
- Ask what they learned from the successes and frustrations.

Review key data/indicators in an atmosphere of trust, where all instructional staff have an opportunity to help establish team goals. The following might be taken into account:

- Previous year's goals.
- Year-end district writing and CRT data.
- Standardized test data.
- End-of-course assessment data.
- Attendance and tardy data.
- Data on number of discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions.
- Disaggregated data, such as lowest achieving subgroup or free and reduced lunch population.
- Number or percentage of students receiving *A* and *B* in subject areas or courses.
- Number or percentage of students receiving *D* and *F* in subject areas or courses.
- Number or percentage of students successfully completing algebra, geometry, and advanced science.
- Climate and satisfaction surveys from students, teachers, and parents.

2. Select one or two subject area targets for improvement based on step 1. Grade-level or course teams, such as 4th grade science or high school algebra should choose:

- Only one or two subject-area goals per course.
- Goals specifically targeted to measurable improvement in student achievement, such as in math and social studies, or for schoolwide behavior (reducing the number of classroom disruptions).

3. Write measurable student achievement goals for each area selected in step 2. These may be written by school, grade-level, or department. Post the goals prominently in areas where teachers meet. (See Annual Improvement Goals form, Appendix B.)

4. Send all goals to district office committee for final approval. The committee may consist of district curriculum director, principals, and teachers. The district committee reviews the goals and returns them with the feedback in a timely fashion.

5. Collect and consult classroom-tested research relative to the established goals. Seek assistance from district office and staff development personnel. Discuss effective ways to ensure successful implementation by teachers.

6. Establish clear, simple periodic assessments, relative to goals. Progress on these can be charted regularly (ideally at least four times per year). Assessments must be developed and established prior to the beginning of the school year if possible.

7. Set dates and times for short, monthly improvement meetings in order to analyze assessment data and brainstorm for improvement and corrective actions. Vital to improvement, such meetings must be scheduled at or prior to the

beginning of the school year and protected from any outside interference. These regularly held discussions should center on

- Generating concrete improvement strategies together.
- Sharing what is working, such as measurable breakthroughs in student learning.
- Implementing successful research-based strategies.
- Analyzing performance data for progress, strengths, and weaknesses.
- Updating quarterly data or charts to display measurable progress toward goals.

Data analysis and corrective action meetings can occur after school. During school, consider scheduling them at faculty meetings, staff development days, grade-level meetings, and department meetings.

8. Establish recognition procedures and routines. Briefly recognize specific goal-oriented efforts and accomplishments by individuals and teams at the beginning of each staff/improvement meeting.

# Appendix B

## Annual Improvement Goals for 2001–2002

_____

Goal 1: Student percentage at or above standard in _____ will increase by the following:

- ____ % at the end of 2001.
- ____ % at the end of 2002.

The increase will be assessed by the _____ (ITBS, Stanford 9, Terra Nova, Writing Rubric, etc.). Note that mean score can be substituted for percentage at or above. Specific areas to address or improve include:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Goal 2: Student percentage at or above standard in _____ will increase by the following:

- ____ % at the end of 2001.
- ____ % at the end of 2002.

The increase will be assessed by the _____ (ITBS, Stanford 9, Terra Nova, Writing Rubric, etc.). Note that mean score can be substituted for percentage at or above. Specific areas to address or improve include:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Remember that one or two measurable academic improvement goals are probably plenty!

# Appendix C

## Improvement Brainstorming Guidelines

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The purpose of brainstorming is to produce as many good ideas or strategies as possible in a fast-paced, positive setting. This first step in a focused improvement meeting includes the following:

- Stating the purpose or desired result of the team meeting, preferably in writing.

- Writing each idea on a flip chart, chalk board, or whiteboard by a recorder. If using a flipchart, post rather than flip back each page as it is completed.

- Offering each person in the group the opportunity to contribute one idea or strategy in consecutive order.

- Giving each team member the option to "pass" when it is their turn to contribute.

- Keeping each person's remarks as succinct as possible, in 20 seconds or less.

- Allowing no criticism or discussion of ideas or strategies.

- Expecting to "piggyback" or build on each other's ideas to generate the best strategies.

The recorder ensures accurate recording of each idea or strategy.

# Appendix D

## Team Learning Log: From Problems to Solutions

Reproduce the following form as needed. Filled out by the teams, submit them to the principal or project leader.

- Identified instructional problem or opportunity:

- Solution to make a measurable or manifest difference in student performance:

- Results and effect of the solution:

# Appendix E

## Recognition Nomination Form

_____

Nominations should focus on actual results or effort made toward reaching school goals, including the following:

- Exercising leadership.
- Maintaining a constructive, positive attitude toward reaching school learning goals.
- Helping to develop common end-of-course or periodic assessments.
- Designing, implementing, or sharing new teaching strategies that achieve better results.
- Gathering or organizing data and evidence of improvement.
- Ensuring that meetings result in great teaching ideas to get improvements for students.

The following is an example of a nomination form:

I nominate _____ for outstanding effort and attainment in helping our school to reach its measurable student learning goals. He/She helped us to reach our school goals by the following:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

# Appendix F

## Effective, Time-Efficient Meetings

This model enables a team to have a productive, goal-centered meeting in as little as 30 minutes, which is often all the time available.[1] It can be adapted or modified to fit a group's specific purposes.

The following should be prepared before the meeting:

- *Agenda:* Participants should arrive at the meeting prepared to discuss and refine the goal-focused strategies the team worked on or to identify a new area of instructional opportunity or weakness. The meeting consists of brainstorming strategies to address such issues.
- *Tools:* Make ready a flip chart, chalkboard, or computer to record brainstorming. Ensure that all participants bring achievement reports, teacher's guides to state tests, learning logs, and brainstorming guidelines to the meeting. Such items constitute a meeting "toolkit."
- *Designated tasks* (optional): Appoint a timekeeper, recorder, and facilitator. These positions can be assumed on a rotating basis.

During the meeting, it is essential that all participants stay focused on the following:

- What strategy are we currently working on? Is it working? How well?
- What successes or frustrations are we experiencing?
- What are assessments and data telling us?
- How can we refine the strategy to promote better results?
- If satisfied with progress in an area, what is the next most urgent area of weakness to identify and discuss?

The approximate number of minutes is included in parenthesis for each part of the meeting:

- *What worked* (5–10 minutes): Each team member explains how well the identified strategy—selected by the team at the previous meeting—worked or how it can be refined.[2]

- *Chief challenges* (3–5 minutes): What is the most urgent instructional concern, problem, or obstacle to progress and to better results? Identify a common area of opportunity, such as ways to increase sustained silent reading time, or an area of instructional weakness identified by the data on the state or standardized test.

- *Proposed solutions* (8–10 minutes): Suggest practical solutions to these problems. Brainstorm using the brainstorming guidelines.

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[1] This model is an adaptation of one designed by Rosemary Beck, Bill Bendt, and Chris Potter, teachers at the Amphitheatre School District, Tucson, Arizona.

[2] The emphasis should be on concision. You may want to limit the time for each brainstorming contribution by applying what Allied Signal Corporation calls the 20-second rule. This method not only increases the amount of ideas that each member generates, but also heightens energy level, focus, and clarity of expression.

• *Action plan* (10 minutes): Decide which solution or strategies might be best for the team to focus on and implement between now and the next meeting. For example, if the challenge is to increase the number of effective introductions, the team might focus on a strategy that includes students analyzing introductions from models contained in the state assessment guide. If agreement does not emerge quickly, rank-order voting can help speed up this process.

At times, members of the team may plan to share or develop materials or assessments.

Everyone should leave the meeting knowing:

• The team's common focus.

• The designated strategies selected to address the area of opportunity or weakness.

• The task to implement prior to the next meeting.

A memo or reminder may be necessary in the early going.

Strategic, focused, goal-oriented meetings that follow this model enable every team member to contribute to and learn from the ever-expanding expertise of the group. Such meetings result in better instruction and improved results.

# Appendix G

## Continuous Instructional Improvement: Schedule/Model

### Summer

- **Lesson and assessment development**
  - End of course
  - Monthly
  - Quarterly
  - Topical/Unit
- "**Lesson Fairs**": demonstration lessons and strategies
  - Publish
  - Disseminate to schools
- **Academy:** Menu of training in proven strategies and structures (e.g., *Classroom Instruction That Works,* Marzano et al., 2001)
- **School Improvement Planning** (see App. A)
  - By ***all*** instructional staff
  - ***After*** getting previous year's results

### School Year

- **Ongoing:** *Informal* recognition and appreciation of collaborative goal-oriented effort

- **Monthly/Quarterly:** *Formal* reward and recognition
  - At individual schools
  - From the central office
  - For breakthrough lessons and strategies (see App. E)
- **Improvement Meetings,** using
  1. *Teamwork* (see App. B)
  2. *Proven* strategies learned at Summer Training/Lesson Fairs
  3. *Common* monthly/unit/topical/quarterly assessments to monitor/refine effectiveness

**Spring Pretest:** in *essential* skills contained in year-end tests. Then

1. Identify areas of lowest performance
2. Review and practice—especially for lowest-achieving students—in identified area of lowest performance

**Spring Break School**

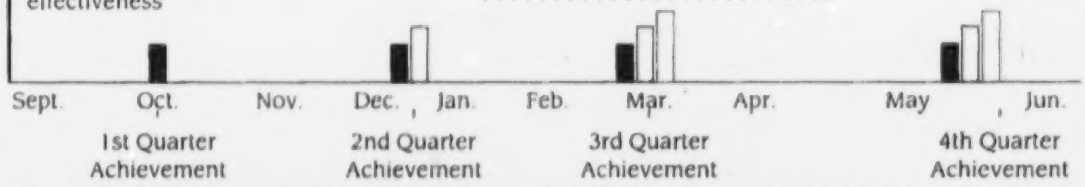
- For lower-achieving students
- Targeting areas of lowest performance

**End-of-Year Testing**

- State assessments
- District end-of-course assessments

**Teamwork Toolkit**

- Meeting guidelines (App. C)
- Team learning logs (App. D)
- Goals (App. B)
- Interpretive guides




*Note:* (1) Everything in this model should be adjusted and refined according to local circumstance. (2) The model is *not* fully comprehensive for all improvement strategies. (3) "Proven strategies" means instructional strategies that achieve measurable, improved results.

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# About the Author

**Mike Schmoker** is a school improvement consultant living in Flagstaff, Arizona. As a central office administrator in two Arizona districts and a former senior consultant for Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL), Aurora, Colorado, Schmoker worked with teachers and administrators to successfully facilitate improvements in a number of school systems. He has visited and studied numerous schools and districts that demonstrate the effective use of continuous improvement principles. Schmoker is the author of the ASCD best-seller *Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement* (both 1st and 2nd editions), as well as two other books and numerous articles, which have appeared in *Educational Leadership*, *Phi Delta Kappan*, and *Education Week*.

Contact the author at 2734 N. Carefree Circle, Flagstaff, AZ 86004. Phone: 928-522-0006. Fax: 928-522-0007. Email: schmoker@futureone.com.

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